

THE ABSURD ENSPACED

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For my little brother, my mother, and my father.

Abstract

The contradictions between the ideal-reality, solid-void, and inside-outside are just a few of architecture's most fundamental and accepted incompatibilities. Not exclusive to architecture, contradiction is ultimately a result of our human condition to seek out meaning and order in a meaningless, disorderly world. Albert Camus refers to this basic conflict between us and the universe as "absurdism" and lends only two solutions: a suicide or an acceptance.

The purpose of this research is to enspace the absurd, which is to realize in architecture an acceptance of absurdity. This effort establishes that the opposing roles within contradiction are not two independent, separate forces up for casual omission (suicide) to ease complexity, but rather that these opposing roles are in fact two intimately entwined roles of the same part.

The absurd is explored through Camus' collected works as well as through precedents of absurd demonstration from literature to the arts and toward architecture. Undertaking the contradiction as the clearest articulation of the absurd and upon recognizing the threshold as the purest contradiction in architecture, this work finds the absurdity in architecture to be the threshold.

Out of our human condition to search for reason and order, we separate spaces (functions) within architecture so we may make sense of them. The separation, the attempt to reason, forms the "here" and "there" and the threshold, the absurd, exists between them—where you may be here and there simultaneously. The threshold is therefore the absurd enspaced as it is contradiction manifested as architecture.

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Preface

From the beginning of my architecture education, I realized myself in this ever-expanding, ever-contradictory study in which I need always to maintain my ever-changing map. As I draw and erase and draw and erase, the eraser shrinks flush to its metal encasing, ripping holes as I run it further over my page. Is this inevitable? As I look down at my work, the paper looks up at me. I feel it's asking me, "what are you doing?" or maybe I'm asking it. Maybe we're both asking because we both don't know what we're doing. Maybe we're not doing anything. There is tension between the paper and my hand as escalates the tensions between what I'm seeking (something) and what I'm finding (nothing). The holes are a result of this tension—where the edges are at the same time paper and nothing.

Stage One:

The Formal Living Room

In Passing

The Dressing Room

The Garage Workshop

The Library

The Body-Building Gym

The Ballroom

The Lounge

01. The Formal Livingroom: The Architecture Condition



Figure 1.10, Brick and Everything Else. Collage over base image found at: <http://criticalobjects.info/>.

Accepted Incompatibilities

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? The answer seems so obviously not the other, but then, a few minutes later so obviously the other; then, eventually the other side is more convincing until there is only one satisfaction: the success of scrunching together countless pairs of eyebrows. Any attempt to pinpoint the first instance of this circular cause and effect would be an exercise of pointlessness: absurdity.

Instead, in this riddle, the goal perhaps is not to figure out which truly came first, but rather to understand the symbiosis of mutual dependence between the two: that they cannot exist without each other.

While evolution raises the question of whether it was the chicken or the egg that came first, it also raises subsequent questions on the relationship between the two. Architecture may ask, in parallel, “what Architecture came first?” An answer, I imagine, would prove itself just as ever-circling and never-winning as either “the chicken, definitely” or “the egg, definitely.” The relationship between the foundations of Architecture is called into question, just as one immediately calls into question the relationship between laying and hatching. The laying and hatching conflict then in Architecture is none other than the conflict between the expecting and the existing. Bouncing back and forth between the chicken or the egg, the expected and the existing instigate the discourse of contradiction in Architecture. And so perpetuate the discourse even long after the work is built (or after the chicken hatched).

Through each “-ism” Architecture has found itself in, there subsists one over-arching, infamous confliction, which remains consistent in all works built and unbuilt. This confliction is, of course, the clash between the expecting and the existing.

Cliché is the dialogue between the frustrated architect who expects his wall to be built a certain way and the equally (if not more so) frustrated contractor who shakes his head and shouts it cannot be built that way. This famed scenario may draw the curtains back as an introduction to the tension between what we expect and what exists. However, the narrative continues. The contractor and the architect might later agree and so the wall is built; still, the wall’s bricks lay in conflict: in an “in-between” submitting fully to neither the expected nor existing.

The expected is that which exists only in the mind: the ideal.

The existing is that which presents itself as a true situation: reality.

Innately direct opposites, the two facets, gripping at the ends of the rope, pull relentlessly in their own directions. This back and forth motion set the forces for further fundamental conflictions such as: the conceptual and the built (thought and the physical object), and, the intended and the actual (reaching from design into program as the intended use of the space is never quite the actual use of the space). The conflictions together enforce the idea of coupling and contrast, where one may not exist without or with the other.

The reality, the built, and the actual are forever the resulted Architecture compared to the ideal, the conceptual, and the intention of the Architecture. A different type of confliction, stemming from the ideal and the reality, is the conflict between aesthetic and function. Often the architect is challenged between what is beautiful, sculptural and what is useful, practical. In this type of confliction, there is pressure to fuse the two together so that they may occur uniformly. So, while a conflict might instigate a “vs.”, there is also the “and” or, more intimately the hyphen where the results are instead the pairing of the contrasts, having the same effect that hyphens have on words, which acceptably combine words that couldn’t exist together otherwise.

The architecture condition calls into inquiry: the ideal-reality; the conceptual-built; the intentional-actual; and consequently: the objective-relative; the factual-interpretive; the analytical-poetic; the in-out; the solid-void.

Tension of Senselessness

The greyscale only blurs further as these contradictions are Architecture's most fundamental and unanimously accepted disharmonies. Not exclusive to Architecture, conflict and contradiction exist in all facets that we have deemed, "just the way the world is". What is this "way" the world is? We ask how to make an idea into reality (although an idea isn't in reality); we create a concept and then build something (although a concept cannot be built); we erect a sculpture and we ask what is its use (although the sculpture doesn't advocate use).

02. In Passing: “That’s Absurd”

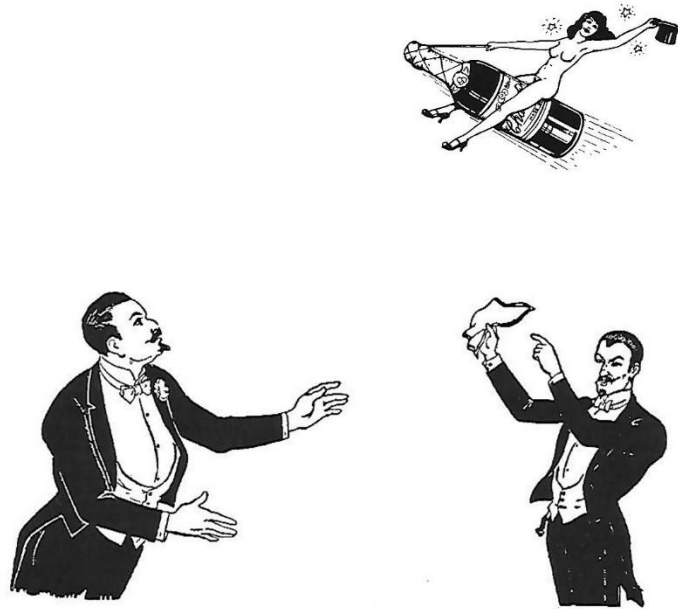


Figure 1.11, Magicians and Champagne.

Absurd in Conversation

During our everyday routine we might occasionally be stopped by something ridiculous, silly, or stupid, and we exclaim, “That’s absurd!” The term absurd is used to describe something illogical, or incongruous—something perceived to be meaningless or senseless.

Thomas Nagel in his *The Absurd* lends us an example:

It is often remarked that nothing we do now will matter in a million years. But if that is true, then by the same token, nothing that will be the case in a million years matters now. In particular, it does not matter now that in a million years nothing we do now will matter. Moreover, even if what we did now were going to matter in a million years, how could that keep our present concerns from being absurd? If their mattering now is not enough to accomplish that, how would it help if they mattered a million years from now?¹

¹ Thomas Nagel "The Absurd" *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 20 (1971): 716-727.

John Silber's Absurd

Saying “John Silber’s Absurd”, works doubly in saying “John Silber is, in fact, Absurd (as in ridiculous, foolish, silly, etc.)” as well as “the following text describes the Absurd which John Silber finds in Architecture”.

John Silber works with “absurd” as “ridiculous”. In his work, *Architecture of the Absurd: How “Genius” Disfigured a Practical Art*, Silber arrives at the conclusion that Architecture of the Absurd is none other than meaningless architecture where the building is useless as it does not perform as functional. According to Silber, the architectures of the absurd is catered to the designer’s artistic motivations, neglecting the needs of the user and being frivolous with the client’s money. When the Theater of the Absurd gained popularity in the 1960’s Silber rejected any idea of architecture of the absurd, “I argued,” he recalls, “that corporate, educational, philanthropic, governmental, and medical institutions and individual persons of wealth would never support an architectural movement in which leading architects would attempt to advance their careers by the design of major structures that were absurd, structures that failed to meet the needs—functional, aesthetic, and economic—of the client.”² He has since changed his mind in his *Architecture of the Absurd: How “Genius” Disfigured a Practical Art*, and instead protests: “Architecture of the absurd is flourishing, thanks to the debasement, inexperience, and supine gullibility of the clients.”³ He goes on to criticize buildings designed by Frank Gehry, Steven Holl, Philip Johnson, Daniel Libeskind and others, deeming them all absurd as they, in his opinion, neglect their uses.⁴

Silber assumes that which is absurd could never be functional.

² John Silber, *Architecture of the absurd: How "Genius" disfigured a practical art* (Quantuck Lane Pr & the Mill rd, 2007).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Phillip, Langdon, "Architecture of the Absurd: How ‘Genius’ Disfigured a Practical Art”.

03. The Dressing Room: The Absurd, Absurdity, and Absurdism

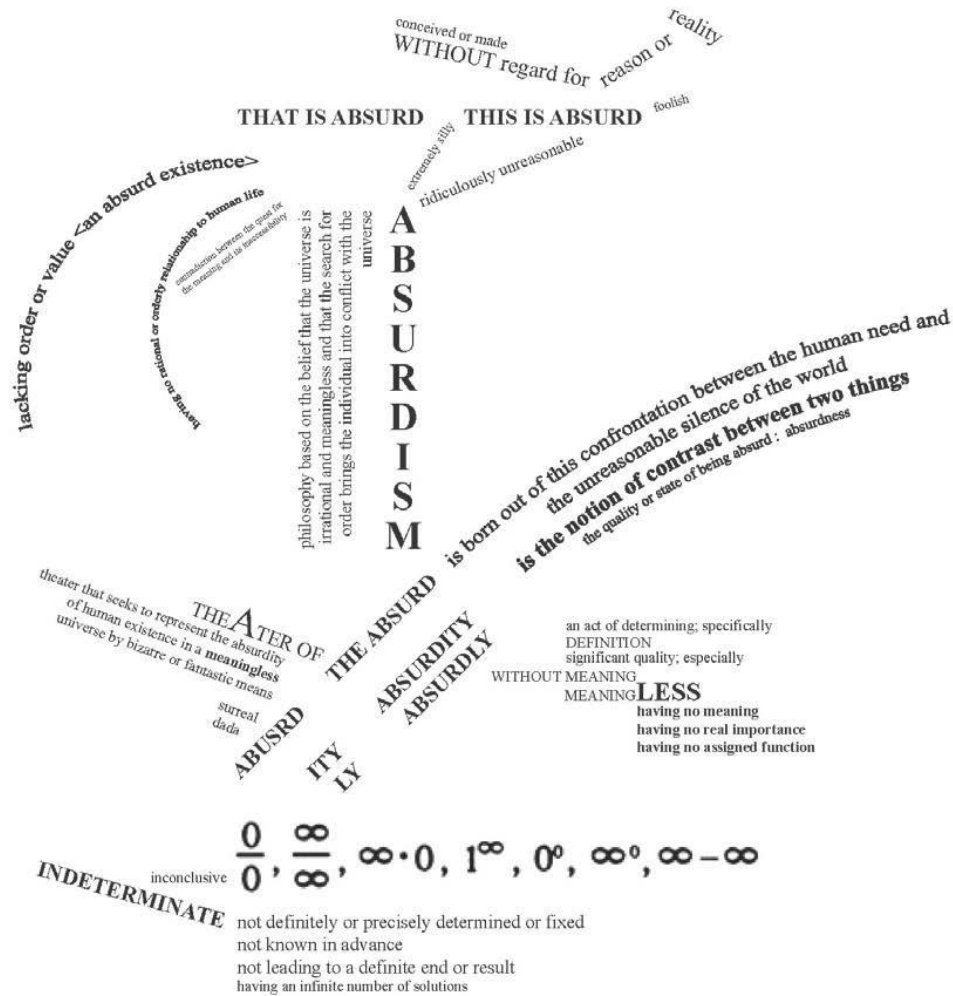


Figure 1.12, Absurdism Mapping.

Tomas Nagel began his work, *The Absurd*, with:

“Most people feel on occasion that life is absurd, and some feel it vividly and continually. Yet the reasons usually offered in defense of this conviction are blatantly inadequate: they could not really explain why life is absurd. Why then do they provide a natural expression for the sense that it is?”¹

¹ Thomas Nagel "The Absurd" *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 20 (1971): 716-727.

An Introduction

Nagel references the absurdity, or senselessness we come across in our everyday and the “blatantly inadequate” “reasons offered” which “could not really explain why life is absurd” are the reasons we seek as comfort, such as: “that’s just how the life is”.

But what is this way “life is”?

Absurdism as it is found in philosophy is the idea that:

“Contrary to the view conveyed by popular culture, the Absurd, (at least in Camus’s terms) does not simply refer to some vague perception that modern life is fraught with paradoxes, incongruities, and intellectual confusion. (Although that perception is certainly consistent with his formula).

Instead, as he emphasizes and tries to make clear, the Absurd expresses a fundamental disharmony, a tragic incompatibility, in our existence. In effect, he argues that the Absurd is the product of a collision or confrontation between our human desire for order, meaning, and purpose in life and the blank, indifferent ‘silence of the universe’...”²

The aim of the absurd is opposite to the advocating, or professing, of meaning and definition and explanation for the way that things are. Instead, the absurd aims to describe the way things are—to describe the experience free of connotation toward a common motive or theme. We experience the feeling of absurdity when we feel we’ve fallen off the track of what we presume is our purposeful path (built by our desire for order). Falling off said “track”, the feeling of absurdity, is the sporadic awareness of how senseless it all appears to be—the contradictions we define as undefinable.

Bonjour, Monsieur Camus

Albert Camus, as the father of absurdism, makes clear this basic conflict between us and the universe— “...from the human demand for clarity and transcendence on the one hand and a

² David Simpson, "Albert Camus" Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

cosmos that offers nothing of the kind on the other. Such is our fate: we inhabit a world that is indifferent to our sufferings and deaf to our protests.”³ We perpetually experience this conflict as we continue a longing for order and with it the doomed inability to find any order. The absurd man, however, finds happiness in it.

The absurd man does not aspire to find any order or hope in his life. He does not seek a purpose. He is aware of the absurdity in which he lives, and he embraces it with a restless awareness of it. And so, the absurd man? He finds content within it.

Perhaps Camus’ most famous example of the absurd man is Sisyphus, the protagonist in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In line with Greek mythology, the Gods punished Sisyphus to forever push a boulder up the mountain and for that bolder to forever roll right back down once it reached the top. The Gods were wise, Camus suggests in his writing, to recognize an eternity of futile labor as a hideous punishment. He deems Sisyphus the ideal absurd hero and that his punishment was nonetheless an illustration of the human condition: he must struggle permanently without attainment. Even in this “punishment”, Camus imagines Sisyphus a happy man as he accepts that there is nothing more than this absurd struggle.

Presence Together: Man and the World

“This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as the world. For the moment it is all that links them together. It binds them one to the other as only hatred can weld two creatures together.”⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 21.

The absurd, as Camus defines it, is a 'divorce' or 'confrontation' between two elements as he describes it lies neither 'in man' nor 'in the world' but rather "in their presence together". This idea of man and the world's "presence together" is further analyzed and dissected into the two instances: existing in the senselessness of the world (collision) and the sudden awareness of that senselessness surrounding us (rift).

So, here we are together in the absurdity: exhausted mortals desperately hunting for meaning and order in a meaningless, disorderly world.

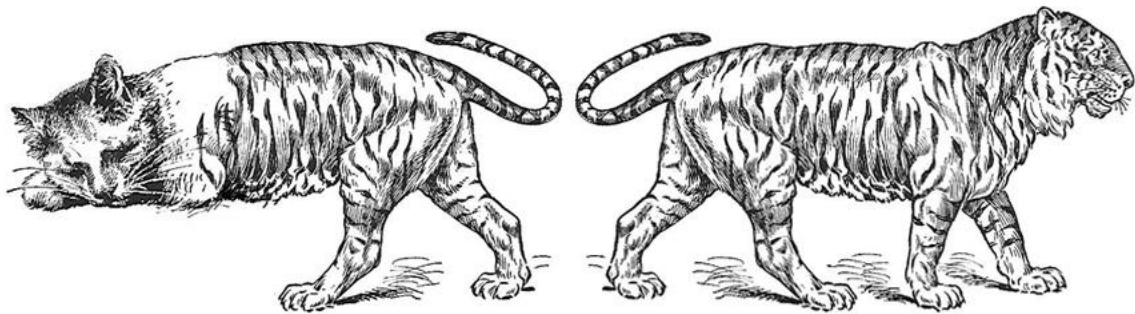


Figure 1.13, Cats.

Between man and the world, there are two moments which together create the absurd:

1. The Collision: expression of fundamental tragic incompatibility in the human condition
 - a. Abstractly independent of the human mind
2. The Rift: the awareness which people obtain of this condition
 - a. As experienced by it, alienation

The distinction between the two should be taken to indicate not two concepts of the absurd but rather a differentiation between two intimately related aspects of the same concept. The collision

is experienced as the rift of subject from object, of man from the world. And the rift is the experience through which the collision is revealed.

Three Possible Responses

If “such is our fate: we inhabit a world that is indifferent to our sufferings and deaf to our protests”⁵, what now?



Figure 1.14, The Bear and the Giraffe.

Camus suggests we have three options—three solutions to the absurd: physical suicide, philosophical suicide, and acceptance. The first two solutions he rejects, condemning them as excuses. The third solution, is held as the otherwise suitable response.

⁵ David Simpson, "Albert Camus" Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

The first two choices, physical suicide and philosophical suicide, call for different forms of suicide. Physical suicide referring to the simple decision to kill ourselves, deciding that life without meaning is not worth living. Philosophical suicide commits the same idea, but through the adoption of mysticism to remove oneself from the absurdity of the world “and replaces it, via a kind of metaphysical abracadabra, with a more agreeable alternative.”⁶

The third option, Camus strongly encourages as the actual only true option, is acceptance of the absurd. Or, better yet, alongside an acceptance of it, maintain a determination to live within it, but not to try to overcome it. Life, says Camus, can “be lived all the better if it has no meaning.”⁷ “To rise each day to fight a battle you know you cannot win, and to do this with wit, grace, compassion for others, and even a sense of mission, is to face the Absurd in a spirit of true heroism.”⁸ *Right, Sisyphus?*

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*.

⁸ David Simpson, "Albert Camus" Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

04. The Garage Workshop: Notions of Absurdity

Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture

“But it is bad to stop, hard to be satisfied with a single way of seeing; to go without contradiction, perhaps the most subtle of all spiritual forces. The preceding merely defines a way of thinking. But the point is to live.”¹

Robert Venturi, in his *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, highlights Architecture as the only facet of art in which repetitive and efficient construction, in regards to idea and physical constructed reality, drives the making. All other facets of the arts allow themselves to enjoy every pleasure of complexity in their form. Architecture therefore is the black sheep since it does not indulge in all the multitude of its nature. Instead, as Venturi suggests, Architecture is forced to be rationalized through the careful omission of certain complexities as the practice faces a mass of paradoxes (or conflictions as mentioned earlier) such as those between what is the inside and the outside, the movement and the immobility, and so forth.

Venturi promotes the value in the undertaking, versus editing out, the complexity developed through the history of Architecture. Venturi writes, “I welcome the problems and exploit the uncertainties”² as he goes on to excoriate modernism in Architecture for its encouragement to reject the complexities and to instead be exclusive. He advocates in his *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, for just that: the embracing of the complexity and contradiction in Architecture. Embracing the complexity and contradiction in Architecture, Venturi suggests, is accomplished through demonstrated recognition of the various paradoxes within Architecture.

¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 65.

² Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and contradiction in architecture*. Vol. 1. The Museum of modern art, 1977.

As an example, Venturi turns to the statuesque pavilions of Mies van der Rohe, whose design is identifiable through its simplicity. Venturi questions its simplicity as oversimplification where the complex behavior of people and their movement within a given environment cannot be manifested into this one simplified form. While oversimplified architecture is able to accomplish a structure which is successful in its use and lends a memorable appearance, it still fails in its embodiment of the complexities, ultimately yielding a “less is a bore”³ space.

“I am for richness of meaning rather than clarity of meaning; for the implicit function as well as the explicit function. I prefer “both-and” to “either-or,” black and white, and sometimes gray, to black or white. A valid architecture evokes many levels of meaning and combinations of focus: its space and its elements become readable and Workable in several ways at once. But an architecture of complexity and contradiction has a special obligation toward the whole: its truth must be in its totality or its implications of totality. It must embody the difficult unity of inclusion rather than the easy unity of exclusion. More is not less.”⁴

Venturi prefers embracing the “both-and” (“black and white”) as opposed to the “either-or” (“black or white”), contributing to his idea that the complex architecture has multiple meanings, which need to, at the same time, work properly within the same system. These meanings might look strange sitting in a row cheek to cheek; but, with the embracing of the “both-and”, these meanings may move out of the linear row and into an ensemble. This ensemble, as Venturi articulates (again), should not be simplified to achieve a certain degree of vapid clarity.

Take the separate elements: the inside and the outside. These two elements often remain separated within the architecture, which according to Venturi, would result in a bland, unexciting clarity between the two. Rather, the architecture should celebrate such a complexity of components by regarding itself as a complete whole versus a collection of individual parts.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Architecture has an obligation toward a complete whole as “It is the difficult unity through inclusion rather than easy unity through exclusion...”⁵ where it may achieve greatness. Venturi advocates this acceptance over rejection of the complexities and contradictions.

The Dada Movement

"DADA, as for it, it smells of nothing, it is nothing, nothing, nothing."⁶

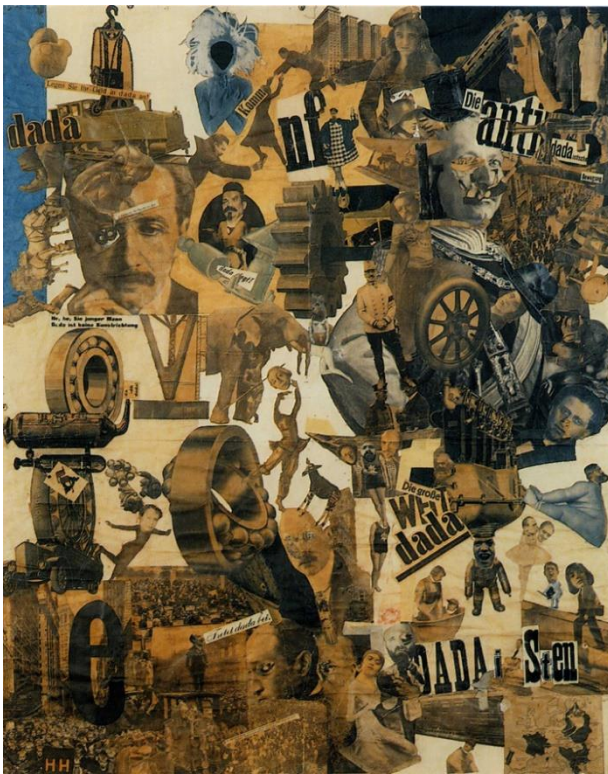


Figure 1.15, Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*, 1919, collage of pasted papers, 90×144 cm, Berlin.

Source: <http://www.newstatesman.com/juliet-jacques/2014/01/new-woman-berlins-feminist-dadaist-pioneer-hannah-h%C3%B6ch>

Confusion and lack of clarity predominated in the activities of Dadaism from the days of its inception at Zurich 1916 until its decay about 1922. That peculiarly Dadaist uncertainty has

⁵ Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and contradiction in architecture*. Vol. 1. The Museum of modern art, 1977.

⁶ Francis Picabia, 1920

persisted regarding the very origin of the word “dada”, which is termed an “infantile sound” by the Concise Oxford Dictionary and a “Cheval, dans le langage des enfants” by the “Nouveau Petit Larousse”. While the origin continues to be argued, the terms symptomatic for the almost consistent unreliability of all that Dadaist have said of their movement.

“Every product of disgust capable of becoming a negation of the family is Dada; a protest with the fists of its whole being engaged in destructive action: Dada; knowledge of all the means rejected up until now by the shamefaced sex of comfortable compromise and good manners: Dada; abolition of logic, which is the dance of those impotent to create: Dada; of every social hierarchy and equation set up for the sake of values by our valets: Dada; every object, all objects, sentiments, obscurities, apparitions and the precise clash of parallel lines are weapons for the fight: Dada; abolition of memory: Dada; abolition of archaeology: Dada; abolition of prophets: Dada; abolition of the future: Dada; absolute and unquestionable faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity: Dada; elegant and unprejudiced leap from a harmony to the other sphere; trajectory of a word tossed like a screeching phonograph record; to respect all individuals in their folly of the moment: whether it be serious, fearful, timid, ardent, vigorous, determined, enthusiastic; to divest one’s church of every useless cumbersome accessory; to spit out disagreeable or amorous ideas like a luminous waterfall, or coddle them – with the extreme satisfaction that it doesn’t matter in the least – with the same intensity in the thicket of one’s soul – pure of insects for blood well-born, and gilded with bodies of archangels. Freedom: Dada Dada Dada, a roaring of tense colours, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies: LIFE.”⁷

As a movement, Dada existed for but a few years and was a contribution to the undecided problems of our century, many of which the Dadaists recognized at their sources, albeit intuitively rather than through reasoning. The difficulty of presenting Dadaism as a movement may be gauged from the fact that as soon as one studies it more closely, it becomes apparent that it has never actually existed as a movement, neither as an organization nor as a tendency in art. Nor did it have any clearly circumscribed principles. Dada groups existed, for longer or shorter periods of time, in Zurich, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover, Paris, New York, in Italy and in the Netherlands, between the years 1916 and 1923; and the only thing they really shared in common was their battle-cry “dada!”, challenging the times in which they were living.

⁷ Tristan Tzara, “*Dada Manifesto 1918*.” trans. Ralph Manheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets* 81 (1992).

Dadaism sought to fulfil a mission as “shock treatment” for a crazed humanity and chiefly for its intellectual protagonists at that particular moment, a mission with repercussions which lasted through in the arts and literature. Dadaism was the reaction to the blindfold society had imposed, and it proclaimed “absolute” nonsense as the weapon against any sense imputed to the war. Dada negated all the values until then considered sacred and inviolable, ridiculed fatherland, religion, morality, and honor, and unmasked the values that had been made idols of. Dada called for an abrupt and uncompromising defiance of bourgeois logic, which Dada blamed on the war and later the chaos that resulted from it. It was an outbreak of despair on the part of the artist, who felt the ever-deepening rift between himself and the society of the time.

“Dada doubts everything. Dada is an armadillo. Everything is Dada, too. Beware of Dada. Anti-dadaism is a disease: selfkleptomania, man’s normal condition, is Dada. But the real dadas are against Dada.”⁸

Dadaism recognized art as a social necessity. It was clear to the majority of the artists belonging to it that an artist who does not make up his mind about the reality of his own time will not be able in the long run to settle things with pure negation. They were also aware of the fact that formal revolt by itself did not suffice for the human and artistic development of the artist unless an adequate substance kept pace with it. If left without this, every new form would degenerate into a meaningless façade.

⁸ Ibid.

Theatre of The Absurd

“The Theatre of the Absurd is thus part of the ‘anti-Literary’ movement of our time, which has found its expression in abstract painting, with its rejection of ‘literary’ elements in pictures; or in the new novel in France, with its reliance on the description of objects and its rejection of empathy anthropomorphism...”⁹

Waiting for Godot was performed on November 19th, 1957 for 1400 convicts at the San Quentin Penitentiary. It was the first play performed there in 44 years. Naturally the actors were nervous to go before one of the toughest (also literally toughest) crowds with such an odd play that had already caused quite the commotion amongst Western Europe’s intellectuals. But convicts too may recognize the absurd.

“The convicts did not find it difficult to understand the play. One prisoner told a reporter, ‘Godot is society,’ Another said, ‘He is the outside,’ A teacher at the prison was quoted as saying. ‘They know what is meant by Waiting and they knew if Godot finally came, he would only be disappointment.’”¹⁰

The play avoids getting too personal; each individual upon its viewing is tricked into forming his own conclusions on the characters and the meaning(s). There was no greater question, no moral lesson; there was only the wait for Godot. The success of this play in that penitentiary might have stemmed from the suspicion that perhaps it showed the convicts a situation similar to their own, or that they were such inexperienced play-goers that they had no predetermined biases or even expectations. Either way, they were not trapped with the intellectuals struggling to force reason into *Waiting for Godot* via their search for a plot, or message, or something—anything more.

If we are to expect a “good” play to have a skillfully crafted, explained storyline with a defined beginning and resolution and detailed character development. Then, these Theater of the Absurd

⁹ Martin Esslin, *The theatre of the absurd* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

¹⁰ Padhy Bijoya Chandra, "Theatre of the Absurd", 4.

plays, works of playwrights Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Luigi Pirandello, and others, would be consider things of ridiculousness. The Theater of the Absurd is far different than any other theater. Each piece is considered foreign with its own definitions of anything and everything upon the stage as if it were its own private world. Any similarities between pieces from the Theater of the Absurd are therefore similarities between the reflection of the world at that time and the thoughts on the matter.

"A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity."¹¹

The dramatists of the Absurd perform through instincts and intuitions performing never an effort to arrive at a sort of resolution. It is not, however, anti-resolution. The success of a play within the Theatre of the Absurd is determined by its tailored attention to the relationship between the actor and his expression, all of which is not concerned with conclusions and insightfulness.

¹¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*.

05. The Library: Camus' Texts

The Myth of Sisyphus

Albert Camus received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957 "for his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times".¹ The "problems of the human conscience in our times" is none other than his philosophy of the Absurd. Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* is an assemblage of essays in addition to the Greek story. The essays, which form the greater majority of the section, describe the philosophy of the Absurd and are followed by the Greek's Myth of Sisyphus for an illustration. Camus advances the philosophy of the Absurd over the course of the work, lending analogies, consequences, and solutions to live happily in this unreasonable, Absurd world.

"Likewise and during everyday of an unillustrious life, time carries us. But a moment always comes when we have to carry it. We live on the future: 'tomorrow,' 'later on,' 'when you have made your way,' 'you will understand when you are old enough.' Such irrelevancies are wonderful, for, after all, it is a matter of dying. Yet a day comes when a man notices or says that he is thirty. Thus he asserts his youth. But simultaneously he situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it. That revolt of the flesh is the absurd."²

In his text, Camus suggests the inevitable realization of the senselessness which occurs all around us, all the time. The idea that any idea is just that—an idea— something we do not, will not, ever know for absolute certainty, besides that: it is certain that nothing is certain. He describes first the absurd condition, which is the idea that we live our lives hoping for tomorrow and for the future, although we understand that in tomorrow and in the future, we are closer to our deaths. He takes the world out of its romantic, sentimental light and reveals it for what it is: a strange,

¹ Nobelprize.org. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1957".

² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 13-14.

meaningless, inhuman habitat. Then, trying to reason an unreasonable world proves meaningless, senseless, absurd. Stripped of artifices and their glows, the world becomes foreign, making man a stranger upon its surface. As man continues his search for order, he struggles to find any. He finds himself relying on abstractions and metaphors as comforts until he realizes too those are just as uncertain and contradictory as his search for order. Eventually, he becomes aware that he knows that he knows nothing except that he knows nothing.

Camus tells us, the human is not absurd, nor is the world absurd. The absurd is born out of the human need to understand the world. The attempt to find sense in the senseless: that is absurd. He then discusses philosophies which attempt to “deal” with the absurd. All of these philosophies, according to Camus, fail to bring any resolution other than the resolution of suicide—“philosophical suicide”. This “philosophical suicide”, professed by Heidegger, Jaspers, Shestov, Kierkegaard, and Husserl, collectively agree that the only way to effectively “deal” with the absurdity of the world is to, essentially, refuse the absurd and to instead abandon reason completely and serve God or by an abstract god.

These solutions do not satisfy Camus nor will they satisfy anyone who is determined to live in the absurdity. Camus questions the notion of suicide, both physical suicide and philosophical suicide, rejecting them in all forms as any resolution to the meaninglessness. Rather, one must live in it. Camus writes that it is the embracing of the absurd, living the contradiction, which offers resolution. From this, he realizes three “consequences” from living the absurd life: revolt (the consistent, constant confrontation against the absurd), freedom (the hopelessness for anything but the absurd), and passion (living in the moment, for the moment).

“Accepting” of the absurd is therefore the only option. Camus states that “in this unintelligible and limited universe, man's fate henceforth assumes its meaning In his recovered and now

studied lucidity, the feeling of the Absurd becomes clear and definite".³ The only connection between the world and man is the absurd and so he knows that they will always be connected in this way as the human need for rationality is forever answered by the irrationality of his existence. Man is forever condemned in a world which is apathetic to his struggles and deaf to his cries: the "unreasonable silence of the world".⁴

A man who accepts the absurd is then an absurd man. And how should he live? The absurd man is amoral (which is not to suggest that he is therefore immoral). He is amoral in that he is solely directed by his own, personally determined integrity. Integrity then, is not guided by morality. And so the absurd man is free from morality and unconcerned with the "rightness" or "wrongness" and so "meaningfulness" of actions. The absurd man and the common man do not have much difference in behavior, but instead there is a difference in their outlooks on their behaviors.

Camus lends us examples of the absurd life through characters, which live the absurd life. The first example is the seducer, illustrated with Don Juan as one who pursues the passions of life perpetually and without hope to find anything more: "If it were sufficient to love, things would be too easy. The more one loves, the stronger the absurd grows."⁵ The second example is of the actor: "He demonstrates to what degree appearing creates being," as "In those three hours he travels the whole course of the dead-end path that the man in the audience takes a lifetime to cover."⁶ The third example of a character who lives the absurd life is the conqueror, or rebel, who knows all his battles have no lasting effect as no conquest is absolute.

³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 69.

⁶ Ibid.

Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* concludes, in its last chapter with none other than an outline of *The Myth of Sisyphus*. He follows Sisyphus' legend: Sisyphus went against the Gods and trapped Death in chains so that no human would ever die. Death, unfortunately, was ultimately freed and Sisyphus', who was to die, escaped the underworld only to be then captured by the Gods. In the Gods' grip, they decided to punish him for all infinity. His perpetual punishment was to roll a boulder up a mountain and once he reached the top, the boulder would roll right back down only to have Sisyphus roll it up again. Camus refers to Sisyphus as the absurd hero, paralleling the modern man in his own struggle (with the absurd). Sisyphus's never-ending agony is seen here as a metaphor for the modern man against his life and concern for "success". "The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious."⁷

Camus notes Sisyphus's inner thoughts as he brings himself down the mountain, watching the boulder rolling down so easily after the difficulty he sustained rolling it up. Sisyphus becomes aware, in this moment, of his doomed fate and so he does not hope, but instead keeps pushing the boulder up—pushing on like the absurd man. Camus suggests that this awareness of the pointlessness he lives in, he realizes the absurdity and then adopts a satisfied acceptance of it: a happiness in it: "the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart ... One must imagine Sisyphus happy".⁸

"If there is a single non-fiction work that can be considered an essential or fundamental statement of Camus's philosophy, it is this extended essay on the ethics of suicide (eventually translated and repackaged for American publication in 1955). It is here that Camus formally introduces and fully articulates his most famous idea, the concept of the Absurd, and his equally famous image of life as a Sisyphean struggle. From its provocative opening sentence— 'There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide'—to its stirring, paradoxical conclusion— 'The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy'—the book has something interesting and challenging on nearly every page and is shot through with brilliant aphorisms and insights. In the end, Camus rejects suicide: the Absurd must not

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*.

be evaded either by religion ('philosophical suicide') or by annihilation ('physical suicide'); the task of living should not merely be accepted, it must be embraced."⁹

The Stranger

Camus' *The Stranger* is a fictional piece used to demonstrate his notion of absurdity: the quest for meaningfulness where there is none. While he does not plainly discuss the absurd, like in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the doctrines of absurdity are found throughout the story of *The Stranger*'s Meursault.

"The absurd...resides neither in man nor in the world if you consider each separately. But since man's dominant characteristic is "being-in-the-world," the absurd is, in the end, an inseparable part of the human condition. Thus, the absurd is not, to begin with, the object of a mere idea; it is revealed to us in a doleful illumination. "Getting up, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, in the same routine..." and then, suddenly, "the seeing collapses," and we find ourselves in a state of hopeless lucidity."¹⁰

After hearing the news of his mother's death, Meursault takes the 2:00 pm bus to the "old people's home" in Marengo, about 50 miles away from his town, Algiers. He stops the caretaker from opening the casket and leaves it shut; he smokes and drinks coffee beside it, listening to the cries of the women behind him. Meursault does not express any feelings and instead describes the actions of the environment and of those he encounters. He leaves on the return bus that night.

The next day he runs into one of his old employees, Marie. As if his mother's funeral hadn't happened the day before, they enjoy swimming and watching comedy during the day and end up sleeping together in the night. A few days later, Meursault sees his neighbor and good friend, Raymond. Raymond enlists him in a ploy to take revenge on his suspected cheating girlfriend. He

⁹ David Simpson, "Albert Camus" Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

¹⁰ Ronald Aronson, *Camus & Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

decides the best way to punish her is to trick her into sleeping with him again, only for him to spit in her face “right at the last minute” and then throw her out. He decided he would trick her with a letter, “one with a punch and also some things in it to make her sorry for what she’s done.”¹¹ “I said I didn’t think anything but that it was interesting.”¹² Meursault writes the letter for Raymond and Raymond’s girlfriend believes the letter and returns. The situation goes far worse than planned when she slaps Raymond, making him so irate that he beats her. Meursault testifies in court that she had been unfaithful and he Raymond is discharged with a warning. Angry at this, her brother and his Arab friends seek out Raymond.

Meursault continues to see Marie and the two of them invite Raymond along for a weekend at the beach. At the beach, the snubbed girlfriend’s brother and an Arab friend attack Raymond and stab him. Meursault walks the beach later that day and seeing the Arab. A mixture of the heat and a glimpse of a knife causes Meursault to shoot the Arab, killing him. He shoots the corpse four more times. Meursault complains only about how hot it is.

While the prosecutor and Meursault’s lawyer attempt to reason Meursault’s actions, the attempt to do so divulges to the reader that the trial itself is an example of the absurdity in which we live: the human attempt to find rationality where none exists.

“And my lawyer, rolling up one of his sleeves, said with finality, ‘Here we have a perfect reflection of this entire trial: everything is true and nothing is true!’ The prosecutor had a blank expression on his face, and with a pencil he was poking holes in the title page of his case file.”¹³

The style of writing suggests Meursault, the title character, to be much more concerned with his physical environment than with the social interactions around him. Throughout the text,

¹¹ Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, trans. Matthew Ward (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 32.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Camus, *The Stranger*, 91.

Meursault keeps always his attention on the physical: his body, inanimate objects, the weather—mostly importantly: the sun. For example, the heat from the sun is present in all major scenes.

Meursault complains about this heat during his mother's funeral, "The sky was already filled with light. The sun was beginning to bear down on the earth and it was getting hotter by the minute. I don't know why we waited so long before getting underway. I was hot in my dark clothes."¹⁴, the shooting, "It was this burning, which I couldn't stand anymore, that made me move forward. I knew that it was stupid, that I wouldn't get the sun off me by stepping forward. But I took a step, one step, forward. And this time, without getting up, the Arab drew his knife and held it up to me in the sun."¹⁵, and the trial, "It was getting hotter, and I could see the people in the courtroom fanning themselves with newspapers, which made a continuous low rustling sound."¹⁶ This attention to the physical supports the idea of the absurd in that it is only possible to describe the experience and that it is impossible to explain it.

Camus' idea of man as a stranger to this world is manifested most obviously in Meursault who is the stranger, which is not only illustrated in his character's relation to the world in the story, but in too how the narrative is written. He observes everything with a sort of scientific manner, objective and detached—to even himself.

"The things we do or want without reasons, and without requiring reasons—the things that define what is a reason for us and what is not—are the starting points of our skepticism. We see ourselves from outside, and all the contingency and specificity of our aims and pursuits become clear. Yet when we take this view and recognize what we do as arbitrary, it does not disengage us from life, and there lies our absurdity: not in the fact that such an external view can be taken of us, but in the fact that we ourselves can take it, without ceasing to be the persons whose ultimate concerns are so coolly regarded."¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid, 15.

¹⁵ Ibid, 57-58.

¹⁶ Camus, *The Stranger*, 87.

¹⁷ Thomas Nagel "The Absurd" *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 20 (1971): 716-727.

06. The Body-Building Gym: The Absurd Life

“If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should *be* this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity. This ridiculous reason is what sets me in opposition to all creation.”¹

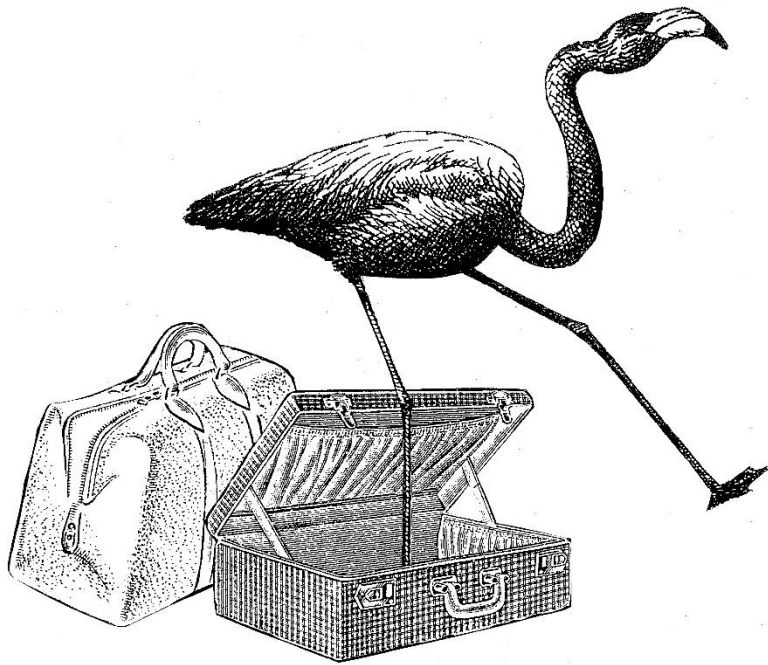


Figure 1.16, Flamingo and Suitcase.

Three Characteristics of the Absurd Life

The absurd life, according to Camus, is “a matter of persisting”², made of three characteristics (or “consequences”): revolt, freedom, and passion.

¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 51.

² *Ibid*, 52.

Revolt

Revolt, as a characteristic of the absurd life, is the response to which one must take against the absurd. Against, not in the sense of confrontation, but “up against” as in coexistence. To revolt, one must first be aware of the absurdity of life and not lose consciousness of this awareness. Once this awareness is achieved, it is both with reason and lucidity that a man may consider himself “in revolt”. Reason, as we humans have created, has limits; it demands meaning and purpose and order. Lucidity is then the recognition of the limits of this “human reason” and so the recognition of the absurd. When reason tempts us to ask, lucidity reminds us not to. Revolt does not occur if one simply decided to let go of his “human reason”—he must not stop his nature to seek reason, but to maintain it and at the same time know that it is impossible. The revolt is a revolt which has no hope for resolution—and to instead happily live in this perpetual conflict between ourselves and the world. The Rebel acts “in the name of certain values which are still indeterminate but which he feels are common to himself and to all men.”³

“The absurd is in his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance.”⁴

Freedom

Freedom, as a characteristic of the absurd life, is the idea that the absurd man is actually free. He is free in that he has discarded and deserted the hope that his life has purpose. And so the absurd, free man does not feel any duty or commitment (or pressure, rather) toward any particular life-goal. As a result, he lives without any constraints of society’s values and morals. The free man must not discard his respect toward meaning along with his hope for meaning. Therefore, freedom, as it exists as a characteristic of the absurd life, is accompanied by the determination to

³ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 15-16.

⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 55.

still live this life and let others live their lives as while the world is indifferent to our desperation for meaning, that is not to say there is no meaning.

“Hence, what he demands of himself is to live *solely* with what he knows, to accommodate himself to what is, and to bring in nothing that is not certain. He is told that nothing is. But this at least is a certainty. And it is with this that he is concerned: he wants to find out if it is possible to live *without appeal*.”⁵

Passion

Passion, as a characteristic of the absurd life, is the intent to live completely within the present moment—entirely in this time now. Since the absurd man does not seek hope, he does not look to the past nor to the future. He is not reminiscent, nostalgic, or remorseful. He does not look forward to anything. He is in every second presently, making every one of those seconds much more intense. And thus, his happiness is inevitable as he appreciates every moment for exactly what it is, never wondering or searching for its meaning. The passion of the absurd man is therefore measured in the quality, not the quantity of his experiences.

“From the moment absurdity is recognized, it becomes a passion, the most harrowing of all. But whether or not one can live with one’s passions, whether or not one can accept their law, which is to burn the heart they simultaneously exalt—that is the whole question.”⁶

⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 53.

⁶ *Ibid*, 22.

Four Characters of the Absurd Life

The characters who live the absurd life, according to Camus, are: the seducer, the actor, the rebel, and the artist. These characters are manifestations of the characteristics of the absurd life in that the seducer, the actor, the rebel, and the artist each and collectively demonstrate revolt, freedom, and passion. Further analysis of these characters is found in Part II, Absurd Character(istics).

“Conscious men have been seen to fulfill their task amid the most stupid of wars without considering themselves in contradiction. This is because it was essential to elude nothing. There is thus a metaphysical honor in enduring the world’s absurdity. Conquest or play-acting, multiple loves, absurd revolt are tributes that man pays to his dignity in a campaign in which he is defeated in advance. It is merely a matter of being faithful to the rule of the battle.”⁷

⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 93.

07. The Ballroom: Instigators

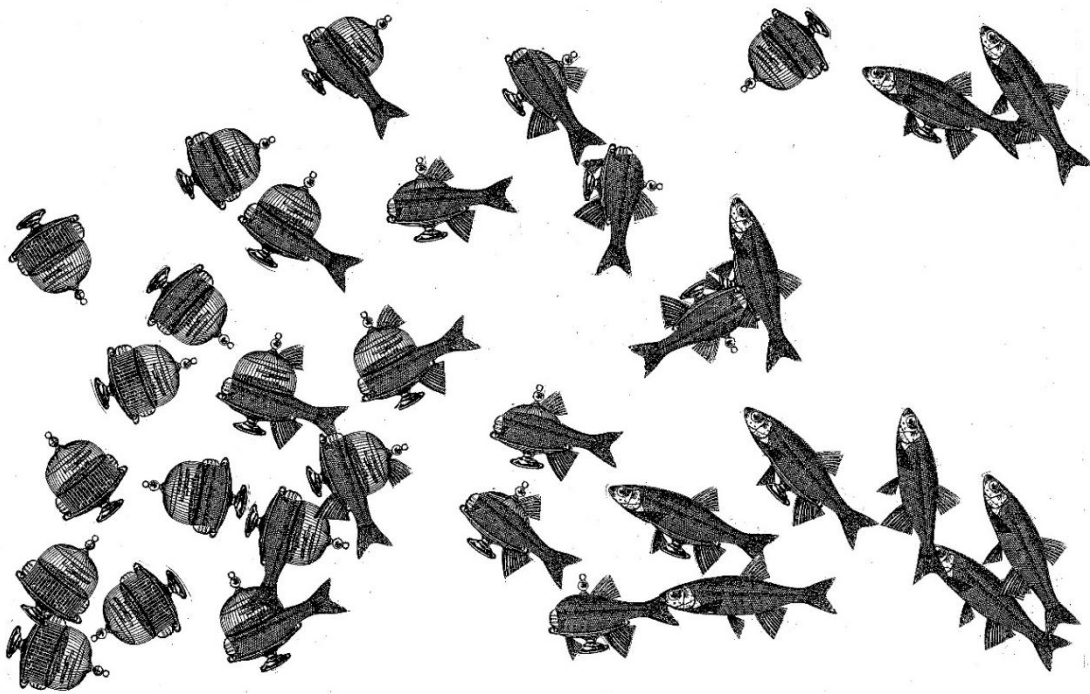


Figure 1.17, The Transition of Fishes into Birdcages.

Creations

Taking the previously explored notions of absurdity, Venturi's literature, Dadaism's arts rebellion, and the Theatre of the Absurd, the absurd can be demonstrated within creation. The arts, therefore, may exhibit the conscious aspiration to at the same time rebel against and continue an existence within the absurd. Absurd art should never hope to make sense of the senselessness; it should not profess to be able to do such things. "‘Art and nothing but art,’ said Nietzsche; ‘we have art in order not to die of the truth.’"¹ Absurd creation must find contentment in only describing the experience, and to refrain from the human desire for meaning.

“The absurd work illustrates thought’s renouncing of its prestige and its resignation to being no more than the intelligence that works up appearances and covers with images what has no reason. If the world were clear, art would not exist.”²

¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

² Ibid, 98.

Rachel Whiteread

Rachel Whiteread's sculptures call attention to the invisible, making them visible through casts which serve as explorations of domestic space and object—or rather space as a result of object and object as a result of space. While her sculptures vary in form and size, the idea of solidifying space remains rigorously consistent. Whiteread's results are contrived from direct casting, keeping absolute to the object's boundaries. She chooses objects which we find, see, and use in our everyday routines to make visible the spaces we've always overlooked such as the spaces within, outside and even between those objects. Whiteread's interest lies within those areas which surround and define those objects sans their assigned functions and uses. Her sculptures, although taken from direct castings of the object, transcend the object as not mere representations of them but as negatives of them, against them.

Closet, Whiteread's first sculpture, is the result of a plaster cast of the interior space within a wooden wardrobe. She describes it:

“I simply found a wardrobe that was familiar, somehow rooted in my childhood. I stripped the interior to its bare minimum, turned it on its back, drilled some holes in the doors and filled it with plaster until it overflowed. After the curing process the wooden wardrobe was discarded and I was left with a perfect replica of the inside.”³

Following *Closet*, Whiteread cast the space underneath a twin bed, which was said to evoke the feeling of a ribcage. Whiteread constructs her pieces from everyday objects that function with the body. These objects vary both in use and scale, yet find common ground as parts intimate to our daily life which we may carry, rest upon, or inhabit. Whiteread's work ultimately challenges this relationship by her method of taking these familiar, nostalgic objects and turning them inside-out.

³ Tate.org, “Rachel Whiteread: Shedding Life”.



Figure 1.18, Rachel Whiteread *Shallow Breath*, 1988, Plaster, polystyrene 75.2 x 36.6 x 7.08 inches.
Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/apr/06/rachel-whiteread-life-in-art>

Scaling up her investigation, Whiteread cast an entire living room. In this work, she zooms out from the space of the individual objects and highlights the entire space in which those objects exist—the container’s container. This one to one room-sized plaster casting, called *Ghost*, was made from a traditional North London Victorian house which was terraced much like the house Whiteread grew up in.

In 1991 Whiteread first entertained the idea of casting an entire house. Her hunt throughout North and East London for a condemned home proper for such an experiment failed. Not easily discouraged, Whiteread moved to Berlin as an artist in residency with a scholarship from the DADD Artist’s program. There in Berlin she cast another room-sized sculpture, *Untitled*

(*Room*). This sculpture differed greatly from *Ghost* in that the casting was of an isolated room that she built herself. Whiteread built the room in the shape of a typical box, which she finished with details like wallpaper, windows and a door before casting it.

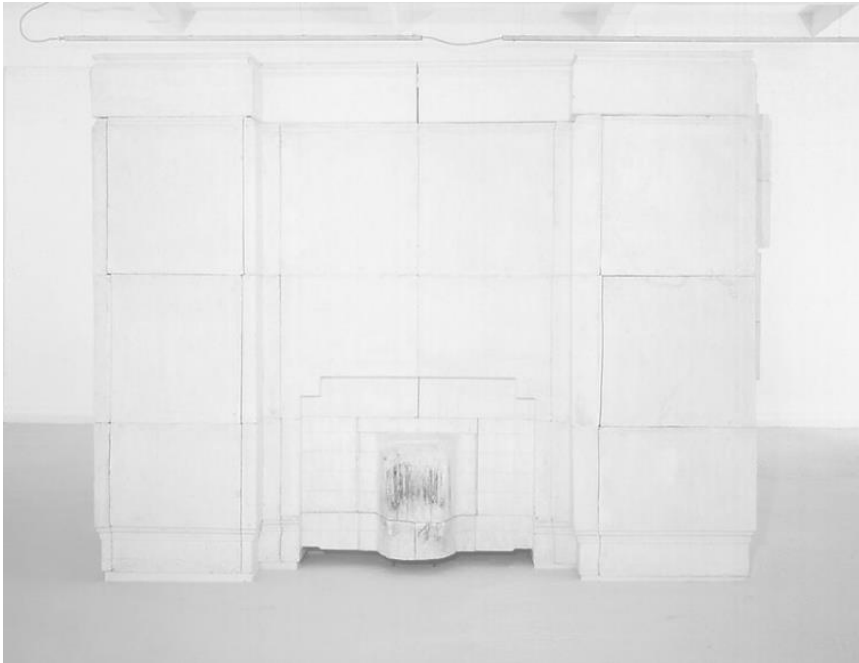


Figure 1.19, Rachel Whiteread *Ghost*, 1990, Plaster on steel frame 106 x 140 x 125 inches.
Source: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/q-a-with-artist-rachel-whiteread-1446750543>

Finally finding a house in East London, Whiteread began work on *House* and completed it in fall of 1993. The result was a concrete cast of an inversion of an entire 3-story Victorian house which exhibited at the address of the original house at 193 Grove Road, East London. After the work was completed and the original house's walls were carefully pulled off the concrete, the former residences of the home thanked Whiteread for "making their memories real". Perhaps it was her most famous sculpture, *House* that won her the Turner Prize for best young British artist in 1993. That same year she also won the K Foundation art award for worst British artist of the year.



Figure 1.20, Rachel Whiteread House, 1993, Concrete 193 Grove Road East London, England.
Source: <http://www.apollo-magazine.com/house/>

House, like all her sculptures, is a solid made from a void, a result of that which made from the absence of something—a physical notion of loss. As her sculptures question use: *Closet* is a closet in which you cannot store anything, *Ghost* is a room in which you cannot enter, and *House* is a dwelling in which you cannot dwell. Whiteread tells us:

“They are almost like doodles. It's what I've always done. When I was a kid my friends would be obsessed by music and would learn every lyric of songs, but I was never into that. I was totally interested in the physical world and would always be making something, playing around with bits and pieces I'd found, changing them from one thing into another.”⁴

⁴ Tate.org, “Rachel Whiteread: Shedding Life”.

While the technique of casting remains a constant throughout her works, the materials with which she chooses to cast are the variables. The materials chosen for the casts adds another layer to the both the information translated as well as the effect of the sculpture. Concrete and plaster are inherently heavy and opaque. There have been cases where the concrete or plaster was dyed specific colors as well. Still, the inherent properties of the concrete and plaster material serve as something beyond simply a method to create something solid.

Concrete and plaster look and feel solid, and when a mattress then becomes a mattress of concrete, it is no longer a mattress in the sense that it is soft and designed for sleeping nor is it any longer responsive to the body. A concrete mattress does not profess any use; yet, you can still lie and sit and sleep on it. A cast of concrete or plaster also implies a sort of impression as the material implies that there was a physical force present that needed to be pushed against the object to get such an indentation.

Resin on the other hand, as Whiteread's latest material, features a much different response. Resin's opacity may vary depending upon any sort of additions to the mix, but Whiteread chooses it repeatedly as a transparent material. Concrete and resin are in direct contrast as solid and "solid" not based on touch, but based upon sight and perception. Both materials are used in the same manner: casting—yet, the resin conveys an airier, delicate matter.

The resin casts serve as a more "absence" feel versus the concrete casts feelings of "loss". This difference is highlighted by the transparency of the resin as viewing the sculpture at different angles reveals different aspects of the object such as where the light touches, doesn't touch, casts shadows and draws a highlight. The corners and edges of the casted object become definitive and near a language in itself, displaying the delicacy of designed use against the delicacy of the cast material creating an overall reveal that isn't captured solely in one view.



Figure 1.21, Rachel Whiteread Doorway I, 2010, Resin 92 1/4 X 29 1/2 X 2 3/4 inches.
Source: <http://www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/rachel-whiteread/artworks/sculptures4?view=slider>

Whiteread's sculptures solidify the space which we overlook, simultaneously doing so by removing the objects intended, designed use. A mattress cast in concrete is a mattress against its purpose—against its use as a soft form; but, this mattress does not become useless. Whiteread describes the spaces we look past in our everyday through her casts which profess no meaning.

Gordon Matta-Clark

Cornell graduate, Gordon Matta-Clark manifested his architecture passion through, what he referred to as, Anarchitecture. Matta-Clark obsessed over defining Anarchitecture, writing and editing non-stop on art-cards. “‘Do not forget the problem of architecture’, wrote Le Corbusier. ‘Anarchitecture attempts to solve no problem’, wrote Matta-Clark in one of the poetic and ambiguous statements in his notebooks.”⁵ One of his art-cards read:

ANARCHITECTURE WORKING IN SEVERAL DIMENSIONS (sic)
MAKING THE DISCUSSIONS THE SHOW AND THE WORK
KEEPING IT AN ONGOING PROCESS
NOT FINISHING JUST KEEPING GOING AND
STARTING OVER AND OVER⁶

The statements Matta-Clark would write on his art-cards describes what drove his creations as it is within the group of Anarchitecture, and so inspired by it, that he created his most famous works. Matta-Clark is notorious for his building dissections where he could slice and cut them open to reveal never before experienced phenomena within architecture. He would transform the existing architecture buildings into awe-provoking, disorienting installations. Matta-Clark did all this using the simplest of techniques: cutting. Cutting the work detached it from its predetermined definition; and, at the same time performed both subtraction and addition.

In his series titled *Bronx Floors* and *Bronx Floors: Thresholds*, Matta-Clark explores scales of this “cutting” in abandoned apartments in the Bronx. *Bronx Floors* was the first intervention of the series and so the beginning of Matta-Clark’s Anarchitectural explorations. These first explorations were physical interventions of cutting through, at different scales, into the floors, walls, and ceilings of the abandoned apartments. Upon slicing all the way through, Matta-Clark

⁵ James Attlee, 'Towards Anarchitecture: Gordon Matta-Clark and Le Corbusier', Tate Papers, no.7, Spring 2007.

⁶ Ibid, 15.

would then remove the cut out piece entirely, bringing it to a gallery for exhibition. The apartment then was left with a hole—a view which never had been reveled before; and the removed piece was then laid out for display on the floor to be viewed no longer as a functional piece, but as a sculptural piece which has been decontextualized and, therefore, stripped from its function.



Figure 1.22, Gordon Matta-Clark 1972 Bronx Floors: Thresholds 2 black and white photographs.
Source: <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/07/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier>

Next in his noted series is his *Bronx Floors: Thresholds*, where he paired his cutting with his own photography. Matta-Clark cut open the floor right before and right after a door hinged and untouched its doorway. The cutting revealed the interior of the spaces below as well as the interior of the wall below the doorway. The photographs served to make this reveal even clearer

through the crisp light and newly made edges, playing with the idea of the threshold, making the *Threshold*. On another one of his notecards, Matta-Clark wrote:

A RESPONSE TO COSMETIC DESIGN
COMPLETION THROUGH REMOVAL
COMPLETION THROUGH COLLAPSE
COMPLETION THROUGH EMPTINESS⁷



Figure 1.23, Gordon Matta-Clark *Splitting* 1974 Colour photograph.
Source: <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/07/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier>

These cuts in the abandoned structures of apartments in the Bronx began the “undoing” which Matta-Clark used as a theme throughout his works. After *Bronx Floors: Thresholds*, Matta-Clark went on to cut into an entire house in New Jersey, a work called *Splitting* and then to slicing the giant walls and floors of the late Pier 52 in New York, which he titled *Days End*. The profound

⁷ Ibid, Note card 1146, undated, estate of Gordon Matta-Clark, on deposit at the CCA, Montreal.

effect that these cuts and removals had on once former solid works of architecture is reflected in those who walk through them— shocked by not what they can only imagine Matta-Clark meant, but struck by what he did.

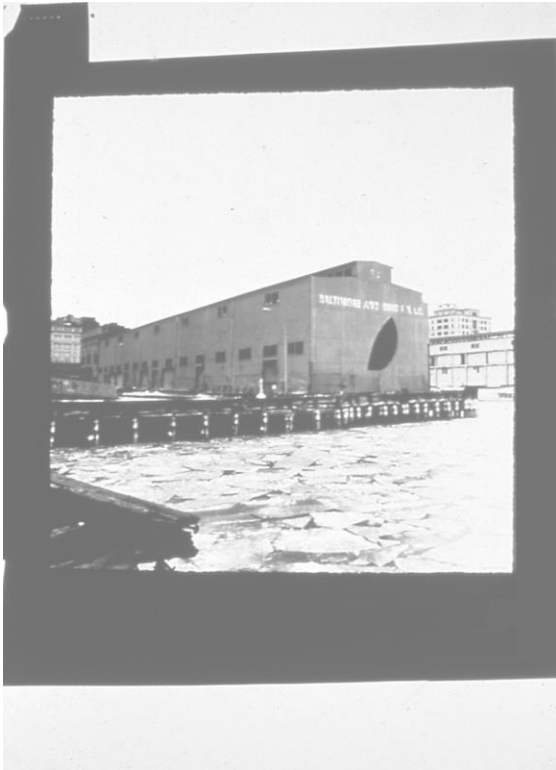


Figure 1.24, Gordon Matta-Clark Day's End (Pier 52) (Exterior with Ice) 1975 Colour photograph.
Source: <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/07/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier>

“By undoing a building there are many aspects of the social conditions against which I am gesturing: first, to open a state of enclosure which had been preconditioned not only by physical necessity but by the industry that profligates suburban and urban boxes as a context for insuring a passive, isolated consumer—a virtually captive audience. The fact that some of the buildings I have dealt with are in Black ghettos reinforces some of this thinking, although I would not make a total distinction between the imprisonment of the poor and the remarkably subtle self-containerization of higher socio-economic neighborhoods. The question is a reaction to an ever less viable state of privacy, private property, and isolation.”⁸

⁸ Ibid, Gordon Matta Clark Interview by Donald Wall for Arts Magazine, May 1976.

Piranesi

“I need to produce great ideas, and I believe that if I were commissioned to design a new universe, I would be mad enough to undertake it.”⁹

With training across multiple disciplines, such as structural and hydraulic engineering and perspective construction and stage design, Piranesi established success and fame as one of the most celebrated printmakers of the eighteenth century. While a famed a printmaker, Piranesi considered himself as an architect though one of his architecture works was ever realized (the renovation of the church of the Knights of Malta on the Aventine, Santa Maria del Priorate).¹⁰

At just 20 years old in 1745, Piranesi moved to Rome to work as a draftsman for the Venetian ambassador where he had the opportunity to study with the leading printmakers at the time. From his time in Rome, Piranesi began to develop and refine his own exceptionally original etching style, “producing rich textures and bold contrasts of light and shadow using intricate, repeated bitings of the copperplate.”¹¹

Piranesi demonstrated his knowledge of ancient building methodologies through his archaeological prints, granting him an antiquarian and entrance into the Society of Antiquarians of London (though his piece titled *Antichità Romane* of 1756). Etching proved a great source of income, and so he continued drawing both the ancient and modern (at the time) buildings of Rome. Just two years after moving to Rome, in 1747, Piranesi began the series of etchings which he is best known for: *Vedute di Roma* (*Views of Rome*). He continued making plates for this series until he died in 1778.

⁹ Wendy Thompson, “Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778)” Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Encyclopedia Britannica Online, “Giovanni Battista Piranesi”.

While perhaps his most celebrated pieces were highly original views of the existing (and decaying) Roman buildings (*Vedute di Roma*), Piranesi also made an exceptional (and too incredibly famed) series of “dream-world” etchings called *Imaginary Prisons*. The series of *Imaginary Prisons* (*Carceri d'invenzione*), presents at the same time 16 very architectural images, yet ones which could never exist. With his *Imaginary Prisons*, Piranesi displays his brilliant talent in the fusing of complex architectural perspectives and irrational architectural fantasies.

“Populated with indistinguishable figures that emphasize the scale and complexity of the scenes, the final series features greater detail and stronger tonal contrasts, enhancing the works’ sinister character. The immensity and ambiguity of these structures reinforces the sense of wonderment that inspired generations of artists, writers, and others to reassess the majesty and grandeur of classical design.”¹²

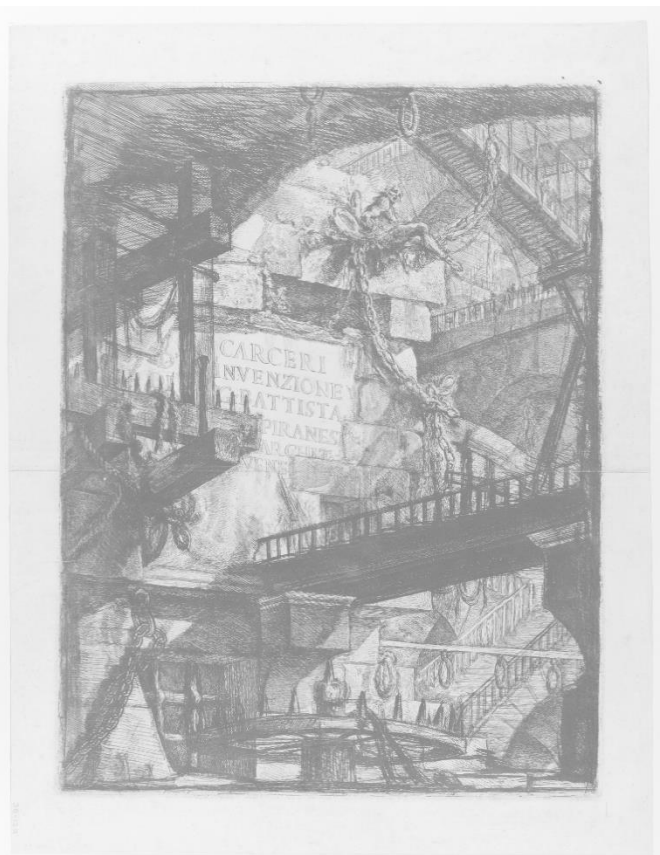


Figure 1.25, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Title Plate, 1761 Etching.
Source: <http://www.italianways.com/piranesis-imaginary-prisons/>

¹² Imaginary Prisons: Giovanni Battista Piranesi Prints.

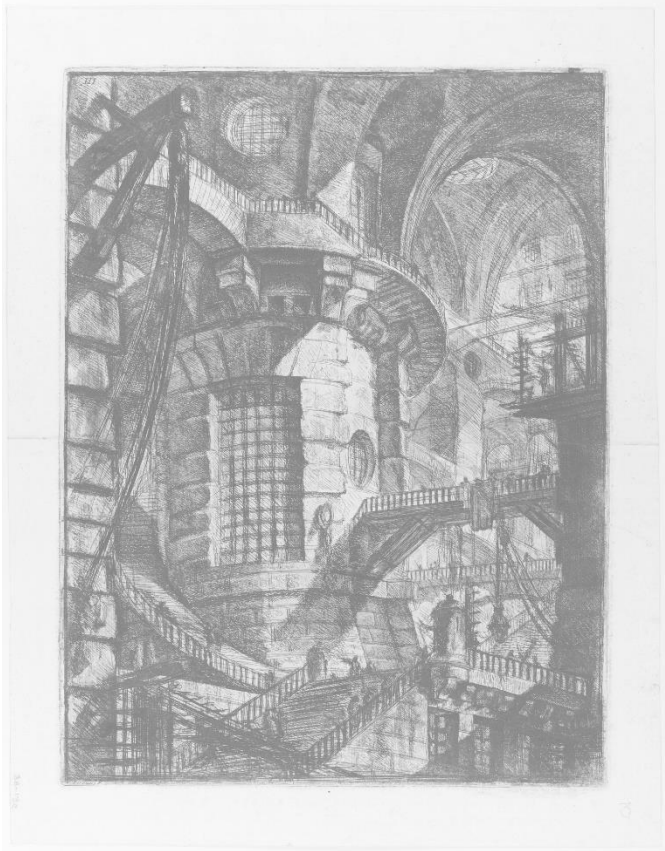


Figure 1.26, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, The Round Tower, 1761 Etching.
Source: <http://www.italianways.com/piranesis-imaginary-prisons/>

The etchings of the *Imaginary Prisons* influenced artistic movements like Romantics and Surrealists, and even a bit in the Contemporaries (long before Escher) as they have a dream-like quality to them, maybe even in some opinions nightmare-like. The 16 prisons, according to Marguerite Yourcenar, are “one of the most secret works bequeathed us by a man of the eighteenth century,” and that they embody the “negation of time, incoherence of space, suggested levitation, intoxication of the impossible reconciled or transcended” with a “multiplicity of calculations which we know to be exact and which bear on proportions which we know to be false”.¹³

¹³ Marguerite Yourcenar, *The Dark Brain of Piranesi and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984).

Marcel Duchamp

“Few artists can boast having changed the course of art history in the way that Marcel Duchamp did. Having assimilated the lessons of Cubism and Futurism, whose joint influence may be felt in his early paintings, he spearheaded the American Dada movement together with his friends and collaborators Picabia and Man Ray. By challenging the very notion of what is art, his first readymades sent shock waves across the art world that can still be felt today. Duchamp's ongoing preoccupation with the mechanisms of desire and human sexuality as well as his fondness for wordplay aligns his work with that of Surrealists, although he steadfastly refused to be affiliated with any specific artistic movement per se. In his insistence that art should be driven by ideas above all, Duchamp is generally considered to be the father of Conceptual art..”¹⁴

Duchamp invented the term “readymade”, which referred to the result of taking standard, household items and placing them before an audience deeming it art. These objects become readymades once they are removed from their context, losing their functions and then put on display as sculpture. If it is no longer functional, does it become sculptural? Duchamp’s readymades question how far the extent of art extends.



Figure 1.27, Marcel Duchamp Fountain (1917), Photographed by Alfred Stieglitz at the 291 (Art Gallery) Backdrop of The Warriors by Marsden Hartley, Tomkins, Duchamp: A Biography, p. 186.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duchamp_Fontaine.jpg

¹⁴ The Art Story: "Marcel Duchamp Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works."

The readymades could also not be born from pure aesthetic considerations. These, Duchamp rejected as too easy—trop facile. They should instead be complex; driven by concept and intellect. Duchamp favored those objects which represented motion, exploring the ideas of kinetics, which was popular too among his peers of Futurists and Surrealists.

Duchamp's most famous readymade, within and outside of the Dada movement, is his *Fountain*, which he created from a urinal. Duchamp did not alter the urinal very much—other than a displacing it from the bathroom, turning it upside-down and marking it with a made-up name, the urinal was still the same urinal. With this readymade, a urinal shown in gallery light, Duchamp sought to stir up the artist community, provoking discussion on what the definition of art is? Who is the artist to decide what is art? By removing the urinal from intended purpose, putting it horizontally to remove further its intended purpose and by signing it, Duchamp placed before the world a work which perpetually questions its meaning as art and consequently questions the meanings of all other art.



Figure 1.28, Marcel Duchamp LHOQQ (1919). Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L.H.O.O.Q.>

Arguably Duchamp's most recognized work is his classic example of Dada: *LHOOQ* (1919).

Duchamp drew on a typical postcard of the *Mona Lisa*, giving her a mustache and a goatee. No doubt choosing the *Mona Lisa* specifically since it was considered "traditional art" and became so precious after it was stolen in 1911 and had just been recovered. The letters written below her portrait read: L. H. O. O. Q. It is suspected that if the letters are pronounced as they would be in French, they would sound together like "elle a chaud au cul", which is slang loosely translated into English as "she has a hot ass". In addition to upsetting countless art-lovers, Duchamp also challenges those artistic values and meanings represented by the *Mona Lisa* for which those art-lovers mourn.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ibid.

The Lounge: Playing Against Meaning

Graphic Explorations

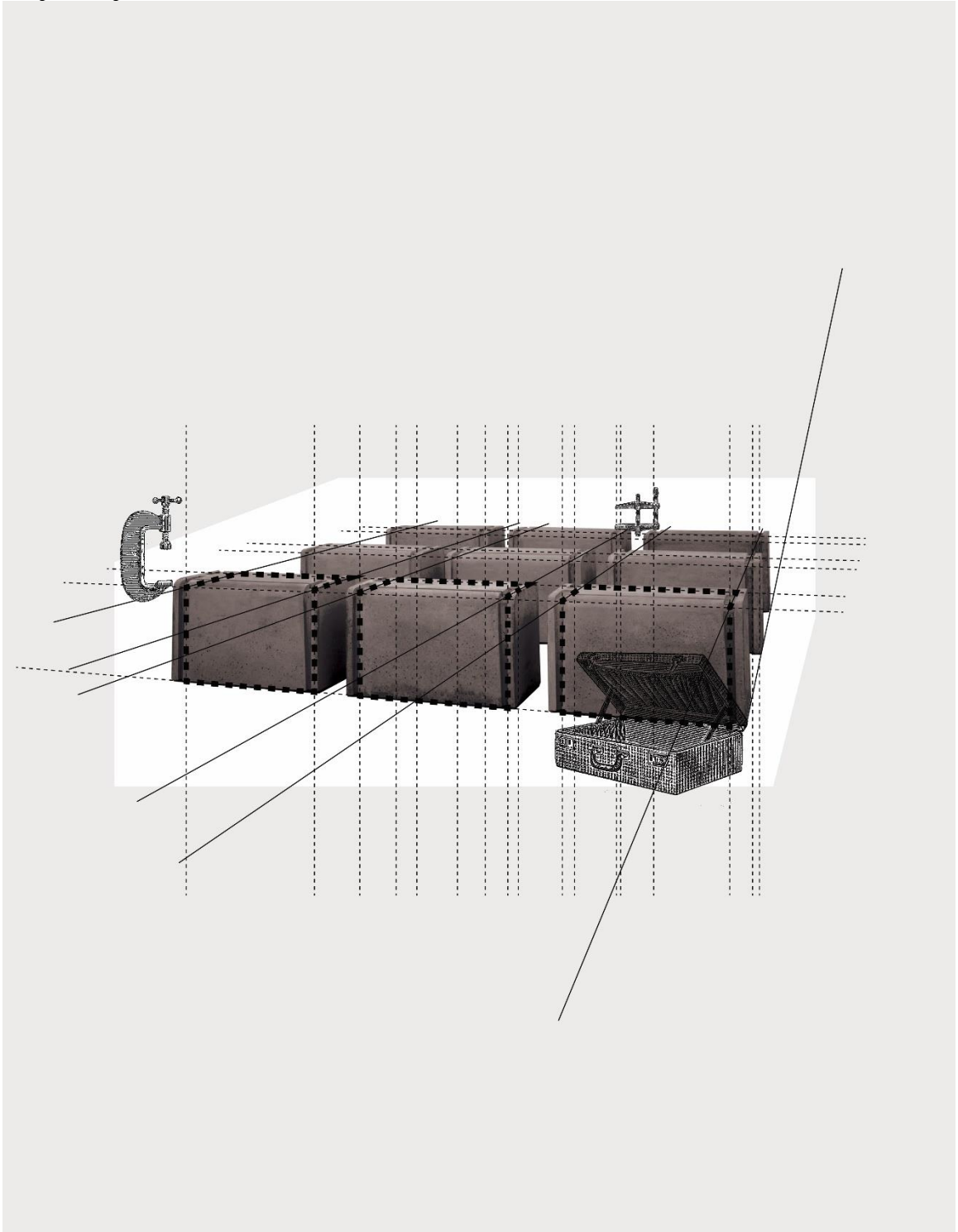


Figure 1.29, Whiteread Graphic Exploration.

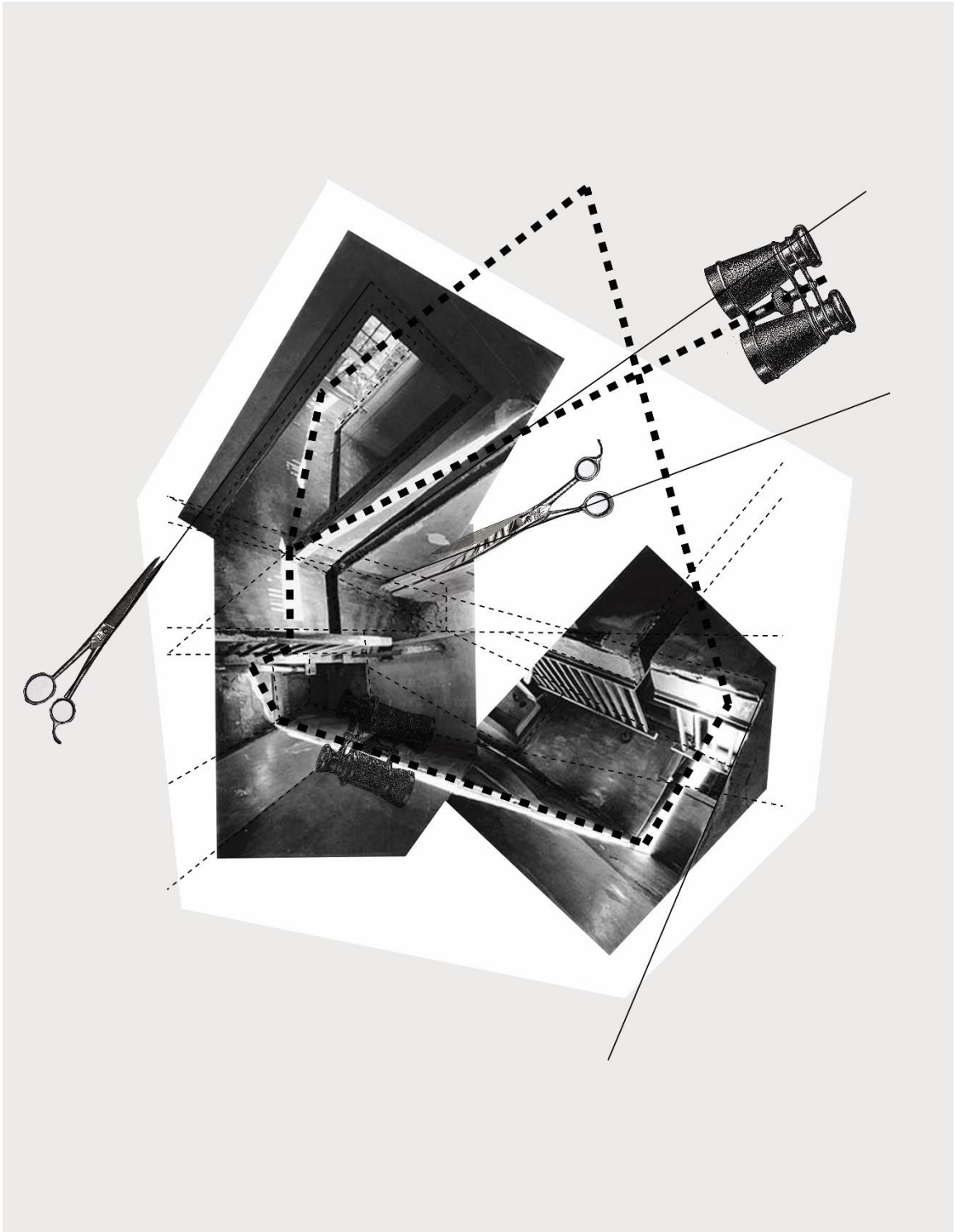


Figure 1.30, Matta-Clark Graphic Exploration.



Figure 1.31, Piranesi Graphic Exploration.

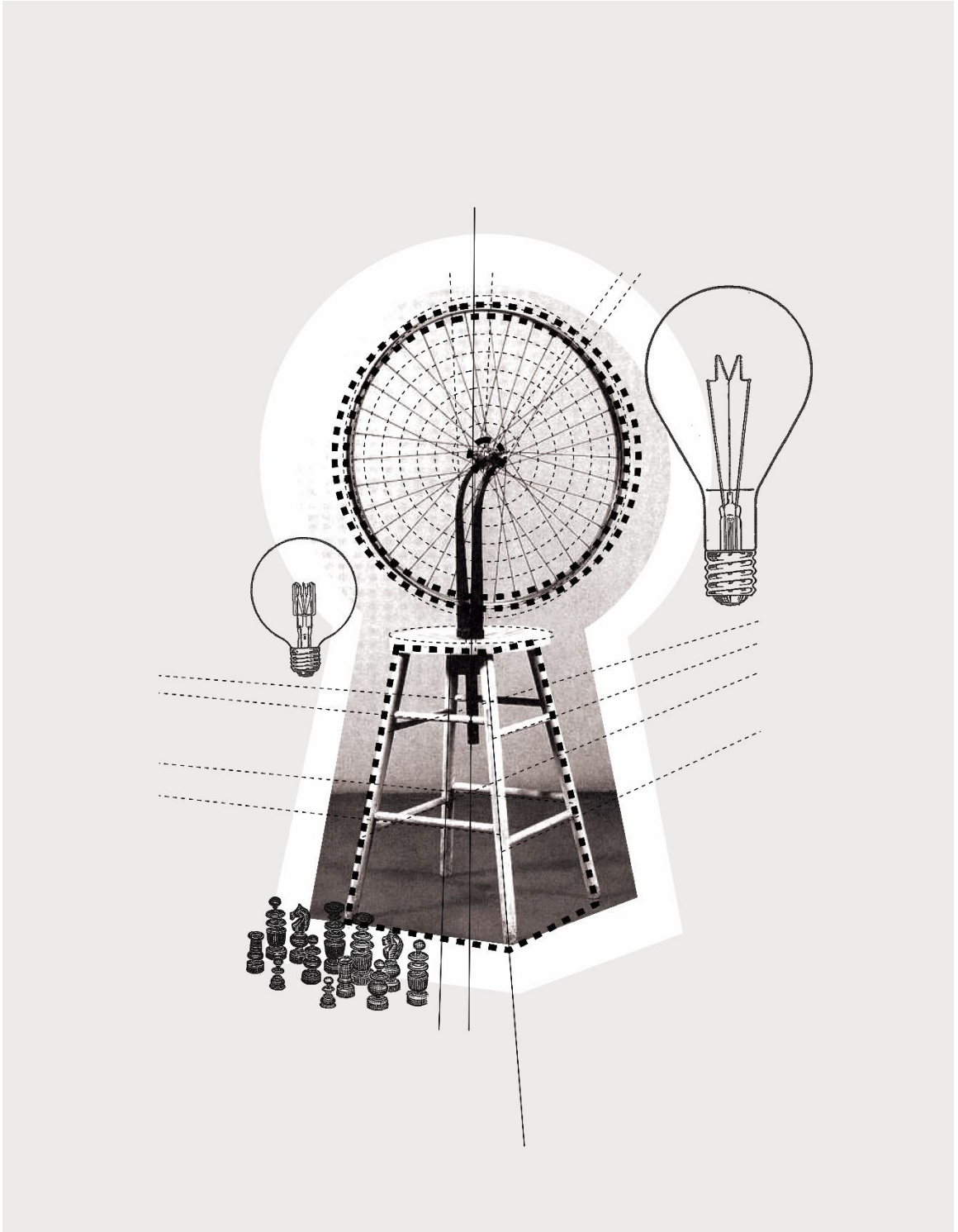


Figure 1.32, Duchamp Graphic Exploration.

Thought Explorations:

With Camus' work on the Absurd as a foundation, the understanding that I've come to about the Absurd, at this point, is that the Absurd is not meaningless nor is it without meaning. The Absurd has a sort of meaning that is not derived from the need or the search for meaning. Therefore, that which is Absurd is not from that which has meaning given to it nor is it made from meaning—it simply has meaning because it is. It does not exist because it has meaning; it has meaning because it exists.

The Absurd, as Camus describes, is inherent in the Human Condition, which is comprised of our experiences. We have this collision between longer for purpose and an inability to find such purpose. The Absurd suggests that there is no purpose and no reason. There is just existence. In this idea, where we find no purpose and no reason, it is not to say we do not find anything. We find that it is just as it exists, which is not meaning as existence, it is existence as meaning. An object, instead of a person or "life", is created for a purpose. And so what is an object which is created without purpose? It is Absurd.

For example, Rachel Whiteread's Untitled (nine tables), is not made to mean anything. This can first be observed in the title of the work, "Untitled (nine tables)". The project then has no true name, no definition other than what it is. In this work, Rachel casts the underneath space of the table, a space that we interact with as when we sit in the chair our legs cross and insert this space, but at the same time a space that we lend no attention. It is only as a solid, casted volume that we become conscious of the constructed space which exists. And so as a volume, a solid piece of casted resin, we find it in existence. We may now recognize its shape, its indentations and its size. But, we may no longer place our legs in it; instead we'd have to place our legs on top of it, or around it. So then, does it lose its meaning as it loses its use? It seems to be the contrary that now that it has lost its use, it gains meaning. This meaning was not attained by the need or

the search for a meaning in the under-space of a table, but rather the meaning is in the notion that the space in fact exists and is now ever present in solid form. We may touch a tabletop and understand the table as an object for resting smaller objects on, for keeping the water safely in our glasses. Untitled (nine tables) then allows us to touch the space which lies under, removing the table to understand just as flat of a surface, yet one which is void of its original use. Though, we may still rest a glass of water safely upon it. Untitled (nine tables) is then Absurd as it does not have any reason or purpose, but it is not meaningless nor without meaning. The cast did not derive from a purpose driven need for meaning, it was made simply because it is. While the beautiful table which preceded the cast was constructed with a purpose and reason, the underneath of the table was not.

Building and Dwelling, and the Invisible Line Between

An example of the contradiction between our buildings and what we make of them:

The act of building is the act of attempting to rationalize life and dwelling is the attempt to live within this irrationality of life. All this is upon, my suspicion, an “invisible line”.

Robert Frost writes to us, from his poem “A Cliff Dwelling”:

There sandy seems the golden sky
And golden seems the sandy plain.
No habitation meets the eye
Unless in the horizon rim,
Some halfway up the limestone wall,
That spot of black is not a stain
Or shadow, but a cavern hole,
Where someone used to climb and crawl
To rest from his besetting fears.¹

Frost illustrates a cave in which a man lived thousands of years ago, this as one of the earliest Architectures, demonstrates the relationship that is dwelling and building as that cave exists because we dwell and we build. It also holds that it was possible to dwell in the cave because we know to build, and yet it was possible to build the cave because we know to dwell. Dwelling and building are interrelated as a conclusion and process. Yet, while dwelling and building are two separate words, two separate ideas, they also carry the same idea as building is a form of dwelling and dwelling is a form of building. We cannot build unless we can dwell and we cannot dwell unless we can build.

Heidegger’s fourfold of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities² are individually and collectively a conclusion and a way of doing in themselves as this fourfold poetically defines dwelling and building as two and as one, a concrescence. With this fourfold Heidegger highlights the essence:

¹ Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (Random House, 2001).

² Martin Heidegger, “Building dwelling thinking.” *Poetry, language, thought* 154 (1971).

protection and understanding, which is all encompassing within his use of “dwelling”. To dwell is to be—it is how we are on Earth as a species. With this he emphasizes on poetry instead of technicality as in poetry we “are encouraged rather to let things be what they are and show their many-sidedness”.³

Heidegger finds poetry in the languages and meanings of dwelling and building as a means of examination and therefore understanding what dwelling and building are as two entities, as one entity, and as each other’s entity. That is, receiving language and meaning just as dwelling and building—there is language and there is meaning, yet there cannot be language if there is no meaning and there cannot be meaning without language. There is language because there is meaning as there is dwelling because there is building. Just as true, there is meaning because there is language as there is buildings because there is dwelling. Heidegger who sheds light on what I call the “invisible line”, revealing a glimpse of its form through the relationship between dwelling and building.

Still, one may argue that not everything built is for dwelling. These examples include cars, roads, bridges, and all designs not of a home. Though these designs are not of a cave, they are still part of the domain that is dwelling as they are a result of dwelling. I imagine Bachelard supporting Heidegger with one of his central theories from his work, “Poetics of Space”, that describes the indication there is an “I” and “Non-I”⁴ that we carry with us even when we are not home—or not necessarily “dwelling”.

In his “Poetics of Space” Bachelard tells us that a house has dimensions of height and width, but also has dimensions of complexity and unity. He illustrates the idea to separate personal images

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gaston Bachelard Maria Jolas, *The poetics of space*. Vol. 330. (Beacon Press, 1994).

of the house such those of exactly what it looked like—the box with the triangle, the front door, the window, and the chimney. This separation of the description of the house as an object to be described allows the phenomenology of the house as something to experience. A house, he stressed, is a vital, inhabited space which is not of “walls”, but rather of memories, images, and poetry that together build a place for daydreaming. Bachelard explains it is because the difference between an image and a metaphor is that a metaphor lends a tangible object as in intangible notion that is otherwise impossible to express. A metaphor, though, only stands for the idea and is without phenomenological value⁵.

Even a shell, Bachelard describes, is a “dwelling”. It is built with direct poetry of geometry, creating a spiral along a logarithmic axis which turns inherently into a dwelling. Perhaps the most interesting of the mollusk dwelling is that it is built from the inside out so the animal is always “dwelling” even when she is outside.

So then, the concept of the animal becomes the epitome of our own building and dwelling, metaphorically for Bachelard and physically for Heidegger. The mollusk built her shell because the animal dwells in it, and the animal dwells in it because she built it. One could even go further into this analogy recognizing that eventually through dwelling, the animal will grow and so she will need to build a bigger shell. The old shell will be abandoned, and though it is no longer a direct dwelling, it remains a result of dwelling—within the “dwelling domain” as Heidegger labels it. This is just as a bridge as while it only for a few moments holds us, stands a result of dwelling and therefore a result of building, which is a result of dwelling.

⁵ Ibid.

Pallasmaa follows Heidegger in his poetic format calling on that “we urgently need to understand that we do not live separately in physical and mental worlds—these two projections are completely fused into a singular existential reality”.⁶ Pallasmaa flowingly reiterates that as one designs physical buildings which are built of physical materials, he is also creating mental structures and a new reality within the mind.

This resonates through within architecture as architecture itself, both the end and means in one, is “utilitarian and poetic, technological and artistic, economic and existential, collective and individual.”⁷ Pallasmaa and Heidegger then agree that architecture, building and dwelling, is both the conclusion and the process. While each characteristic of architecture can be pulled out and separated, the characteristic of conclusion as process and process as conclusion (building as dwelling and dwelling as building) cannot be pulled out the architecture. Pallasmaa though adds a new dimension to the idea. This dimension is that of the inner world: our minds. This then brings dwelling into thinking and building into acting. Here I am left wondering, what else is dwelling? What else is building? If they are not bound to their physical and poetic definitions, where else are they? What else are they?

Within the most ancient architecture live the most ancient artworks. I imagine in that cave in Frost’s poem were paintings. In the mind of Semper there is no distinction between the two methods—that the laws which ruled those works of art are no different than those which ruled products of craft⁸. These laws, as Semper deducts, govern each other as governors for each other as that which rules art are those of craft, and that which rules craft are those of art.

⁶ Juhani Pallasmaa, "New Architectural Horizons" *Architectural Design* 77, no. 2 (2007) 16-23.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Joseph Rykwert, "Semper and the Conception of Style" *Gottfried Semper und die Mitte des 19* (1982) 67-81.

For example: the mat. The mat is both art and craft as it is woven in different textile patterns and woven with different color patterns. These two characteristics of how it is made and how it looks relates to how it is used and why it is made. The woven craft provides function and the dying of the material displays aesthetics. But the color pattern does not concern itself with the reason it is woven just as the woven pattern does not concern itself with the reason it was dyed. Yet, both reasons result in one object.

The mat is an object of dwelling and an object of building. Semper's theory tell us "there is no distinction (in his mind) between the laws which govern the work of art and those of a product of craft"⁹ he tells that the method in which the mat was woven follows the same laws as the way in which the mat was dyed so then the reasons the mat was crafted and dyed carry a specific relationship. This relationship, I conclude is none other than the relationship between dwelling and building since the way it is crafted and the way it is dyed is a reflection of the reason it exists. The interlocking of the fibers exists only to keep something out or in, or what have you. The method of weaving is therefore a direct design driver for the rules in which a mat can be crafted. Even before the mat is woven, some fibers are dyed; and so, the mat is then woven with raw and dyed pieces working together to form a pattern. That is where the governance relates.

The mat is both craft and art and it is one as art and craft are one as dwelling and building are one. Whether or not there is some sort of distinction between the laws which govern the work of art and those of the product of craft that in fact exists, I can't help but to connect that if perhaps it is not the idea that craft and art follow the same rules, but rather the idea that they follow each other.

⁹ Ibid.

What of paintings? Through my first interpretation, the question asked and answered in Cixous' analysis of Rembrandt's Bathsheba, found in her work "Stigmata", is the question of how is it that we perceive and represent objects¹⁰. My first thought of the painting was that Bathsheba, sitting on her bed, is nude. Reviewing the painting, it is still my first thought. I can imagine that this is the most common first thought as it is the first aspect of the painting which Cixous addresses in her analysis. It was probably her first thought too. She analytically and poetically introduces the nudity in the painting and with such she strengthens her conclusion that Bathsheba is nude, yet not nude and then further in her analysis, Cixous tells us it is not nudity as an exposed body, but nudity as where it is not exposed: the groin. Rembrandt lays a delicate layer of fabric over Bathsheba in that one, only place and this overlapping creates complexity as this fabric conceals Bathsheba. "Without this transparent nothing we would forget that she is nude."

This is the paradox representation in Rembrandt's Bathsheba: that she is exposed and covered simultaneously. Along this path Cixous acknowledges the darkness in the painting. Yet does the darkness only exist because there is light in the painting? Or is there the notion of light because there is darkness? This theme stems from the idea that Bathsheba is nude and not nude. She is in darkness yet in light.

I collect my first analysis of Cixous' Bathsheba in that this overlapping of perception and representation in the body as well as the walls in Rembrandt's Bathsheba makes me wonder: Yet is that not the point of a painting, to represent something that we would not otherwise notice or understand or relate to or feel or appreciate or think (but is that not the point of architecture). Perhaps we would not have noticed ourselves if it weren't for architecture. Perhaps we would have never understood the way in which we sleep if we did see how we have made our beds.

¹⁰ Helene Cixous and MacGillivray, Bathsheba or the interior Bible (*New literary history*: California, 1993), 821-836.

Perhaps we wouldn't sleep at all if we did not make a place for sleeping, just as if we did not dwell we would not build and the inverse. Representation is the end result and perceiving is the process. Then, representation is building and perceiving is dwelling.

Cisoux introduced me to the idea of something existing because something else does, and vice versa. For example, the idea that Bathsheba is naked only exists because there is a veil over her and that veil exists because Bathsheba is naked. From this I cannot connect Heidegger's idea of dwelling is building is dwelling is building. I got deeper into investigation with the concept of time. The past exists because the present and future exist and the present and future exist because the past exists. So then, history exists because modernity exists and historical architecture exists because modern architecture exists. There is a lot of existing going on; but, only because there is a lot of existing going on. And this is the paradox as the past, present, and future get mixed into architecture, what then is its "true expression of time" other than the relationships we define through the past present and future?

Our bodies are an ever-changing, ever-showing relationship of the past, present and future. Adolf Loos zooms in on ornamentation on the body: tattoos¹¹. Ironically, in Loos' day, it was only criminals who had tattoos and the most prestigious buildings which had ornamentation. Mies had no tattoos, but the Barcelona pavilion had the color-saturated marble wall. Likewise, Le Corbusier had no tattoos, but the Villa Shodhan had stained glass windows. Maybe they are not ornamentations and are, instead, relationships each dependent on each other.

Barthes' "Semiology and the Urban" suggests, "'The city is a discourse,' he observes, 'and this discourse is truly a language.'" From this Barthes "warns" that the relationship between what he

¹¹ Adolf Loos and Adolf Opel, *Ornament and crime: selected essays*, (Ariadne Press CA, 1998).

calls “signified” and “signifier” should not be considered as a static relationship.¹² In order to understand Barthes more clearly, I, upon first analysis, looked up the definition of signified and signifier. According to Merriam-Webster: “signified: a concept or meaning as distinguished from the sign through which it is communicated — compare SIGNIFIER” and then “signifier: a symbol, sound, or image (as a word) that represents an underlying concept or meaning — compare SIGNIFIED”¹³.

From this I imagined what a sign communicates and what the sign actually is within the physical realm (The Formal Living Room: The Architecture Condition, Accepted Incompatibilities).

Barthes goes forward on this relationship, in that signifieds can never be enclosed within a full and final signification since there is an “infinite chain” of significations within signifieds. And then further in that still, signifiers are stable while it is the signified which are transient. I challenged Barthes that this discourse is in fact not a language and that it is, instead, simply, purely, and solely a discourse where architecture is “truly” independent of a language and dependent on the relationship between building and dwelling. The signified, the building, and the signifier, the dwelling, are both interchangeable with not only words, but interchangeable with themselves as the discourse is the relationship between.

Architecture is the essence of all that we dwell and all that we build. Layers upon layers of art and craft, representation and perception, time and time, ornamentation and non-ornamentation, and the signified and signifiers live within it (and maybe some outside of it, but still in relation to it).

¹² Roland Barthes, "Semiology and the Urban." *The city and the sign: An introduction to urban semiotics* (1986) 87-98.

¹³ Merriam-Webster Online.

Buildings and dwellings all connected, linked by this invisible line which is the foundation upon all that Architecture is created: The relationships *between*.

So where does this leave me, to connect the dots? The dots are forever in relation and therefore connected by this invisible line which lies between them. As I study through the looking glass of my own interpretations, I am left with a curiosity of the relationship between where I suspect absurdity exists/can exist as architecture.

From here stems an appreciation for ambiguity, for the layers of thought and poetry which reveal themselves simple after directed consideration. And more so this invisible line that is the relationship between all that exists under Architecture design, between building and dwelling where it is both and neither. It's a type of magic, this line that connects it all; each of us walking along it, it one foot directly before another—walking in relation to what we perceive around us—though we can't see what it is we're on.

I play on this invisible line, which lies in contradiction as the relationship, the in-between, granting the invisible line at the same time its invisibility and its shape.

But what is this invisible line between?

Stage Two:

Home Theater

Bedrooms 1-5

The Neighbor's House

The Hallway

The Front Entry

The Screened Patio

01. Home Theater: Non-Signal, Non-Place

A vignette: Non—not “no”.

Projection

For Freud, the theory of projection was a type of self-defense used to discard any undesirable emotion (thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, etc.) onto “the Face”¹ of another person. Any other, anything, any space, outside of the self becomes unique through the condition of projection. This projection reaches out and onto the object before it, referencing it as a recipient and receptacle of the self. It is an unconscious boundary we perceive on “‘the elsewhere’ and the ‘otthewise’ and the ‘other’”.²

This idea of the other confronts us with objects which object that they are not part of the self—they are the others. Taking Buber’s I-Thou pair as I-other, the words may break down into the simple parts of subject and object. The relationship of the two connected through projection renders them greater than just the sum of their parts. One cannot, will not, exist without the other.

The idea that one cannot exist without the other is articulated in Absurdism as the inseparable revolt and human condition, where we persist to continue (revolt) our human condition with the awareness that it is all meaningless. More simply, it is the idea that the contradictions we find in the world, the I-Other, though seemingly separate, are inevitably, intimately linked.

There is an I because there is an other.

¹ Lévinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*. (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

² Ibid.

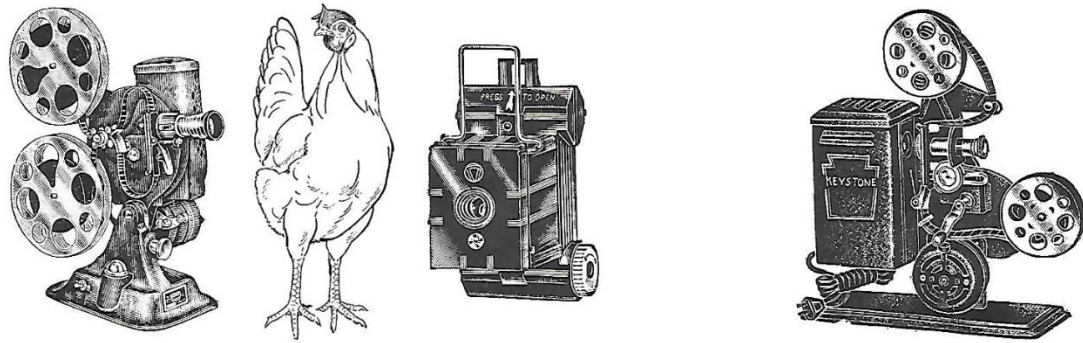


Figure 2.10, Projectors.

Projector

It wasn't that the lecture was boring, it was just so long; and my mind wandered a bit: bouncing from what the professor was saying to what the projector was showing—to then realize alongside the presentation was a second projection displaying the text: "No Signal". Meaningless. Useless. The school put in two projectors side by side which served to display the same image side by side; therefore, whichever side of the classroom you chose, you could see the image proper. The professor knew there'd only be a handful of people (14 enrolled, 2 waitlisted) in the classroom, and as a result, I suspect he only connected his presentation to one of the projectors, thinking that he didn't need the other. He was right—one projector served the 15 of us just fine. But the other projector wasn't turned off: so, on one side of the room there was a projected image, and on the other side of the room there was a projected "No Signal".

Image

No Signal

On.
 "No signal".
 Unplug.
 Re-plug.
 On.
 "No signal"
 Off.

Unplug.
Re-Plug.
On.
“No signal”.

Image

No Signal

The projector tells us “no signal”. So, we think to unplug it and re-plug it with the hope that it’ll work. What if it forever read “no signal”? Well, it still lights up. And if you collected a bunch of projectors which didn’t work anymore, and faced them all toward the same wall? It would light up the whole room. Imagine when someone walks past the projector’s “no signal”. We see the person when his silhouette briefly blocks the illumination on the wall.

The “no signal” indicates that the projector is “not working”. But it is “working” it just has “no signal”. The projector no longer performs its function of projecting a signal, but it does still project “no signal” which is still, technically a signal. The projection of a “no projection” is still a projection. It is, as I imagine it, a non-projection, or a non-signal: a signal that there is no signal. The projector is limited to this. It does not explain why it doesn’t have a signal; it only describes that it merely doesn’t have one.

Traveler

A Brief Exploration of *Non-Places*

“It would be a mistake to see this play of images [non-places] as nothing but an illusion (a postmodern form of alienation). The reality of a phenomenon has never been exhaustively understood by analysing its determinates. What is significant in the experience of non-place is its power of attraction, inversely proportional to territorial attraction, to the gravitational pull of place tradition.”³

There are non-places because there are places, and too “no-places”, which are “other” places.

Perhaps non-places and the Absurd share a kind of relationship. For a moment, accepting that the methodology of the non-place has ties to the Absurd, then Marc Augé has provided in his *Non-Places*, a play on what Absurdism and Architecture might be.

Through Augé’s own *Non-Places*, where the idea of the non-place is explored and described with following terms: transit, interchange, traveler. The non-place is the space which exists before, or en route, the place. It is that which man becomes between himself and his place. Within this non-place are the users, the travelers- who differ from the passengers in that the passenger is a user who has a determinate place: a destination. The travelers can be recognized as absurd, “he drains something and is constantly on the move.”⁴

“Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten. But non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified – with the aid of a few conversions between area, volume and distance – by totaling all the air, rail, and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called ‘means of transport’ (aircraft, trains, and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks...”⁵

³ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London and New York: Verso 1995).

⁴ Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 79.

⁵ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*

02. Bedrooms 1-5: The Absurd Character (istics)

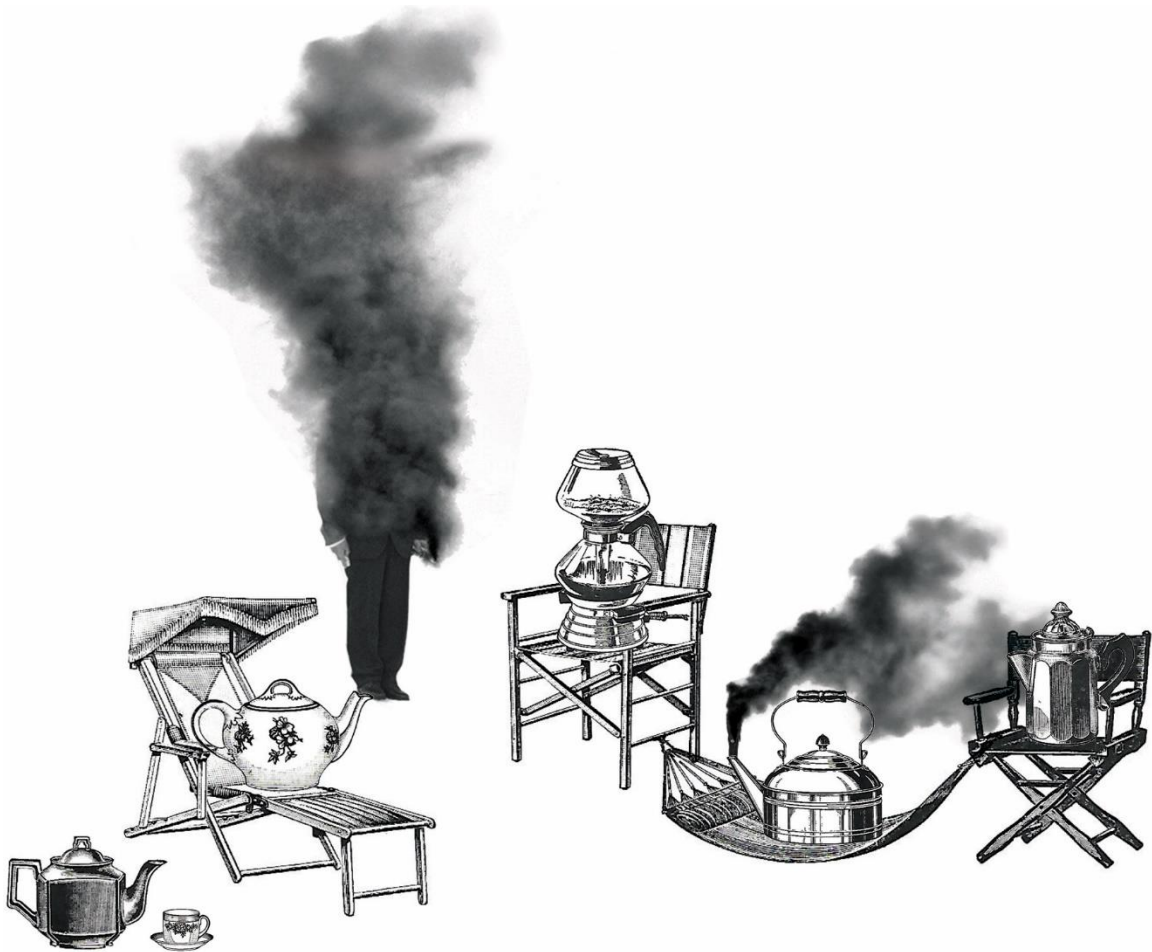


Figure 2.12, Teapots 1-5.

Characters, Not Men

The following text requires along with it an understanding that these four characters are in fact extreme examples of those who live the absurd life. Therefore, the descriptions of these Absurd characters reach for the extremity of their identities and so are characters, and not men.

Extremities noted,

“What is an Absurd Character?”

It is a specific disposition (or humor), not lifestyle, which renders an Absurd Character.

& this disposition is the perpetual consciousness of the:

Senselessness

Pointlessness

Meaninglessness

of all his struggles.

And with that awareness, he must maintain an acceptance of it;

And too a determination to continue an existence with the Absurdity, and not try to overcome it;

And so the Absurd character does not commit fully to anything other than committing to nothing;

And instead places all value on the Experience.

“In Italian museums are sometimes found little painted screens that the priest used to hold in front of the face of condemned men to hide the scaffold from them. The leap in all its forms, rushing into the divine or the eternal, surrendering to the illusions of the everyday or of the idea—all these screens hide the absurd. But there are civil servants without screens, and they are the ones of whom I mean to speak.”¹

Camus' Absurdism is demonstrated through his characters who live the Absurd life. Those outside of the Absurd might misinterpret the role of these characters as they pass them by or come across their stories through 'talk'. In a meaningful setting, where the meaning is assumed, strolls the Absurd character without a "screen" deeming his way of life as illogical. His behavior stops the passerby for a moment as he turns his head and thinks, "What is that man doing? That makes no sense." The passerby then will probably think, "What am I doing? I am doing

¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 91.

something else, which I'm sure makes sense." And for a moment after that, he might even wonder what in fact "makes sense" and then forget the thought almost instantly, returning back to what he is doing: his "sense".

For example, take the image of the child. The child is never doing anything in particular, maybe playing with toys modeled after the 'adult world' (weirdly after the things we've grown to find as a chore) or playing on a playground made of random shapes and colors, or playing with nothing at all—running around in circles, jumping up and down, making annoying sounds, or an overwhelming mélange of everything and anything said child can think of (which is impressively unlimited). After taking it all in, I start to envy the child, who is meaninglessly playing. The child makes me wish I were a child too, and then I think, "why can't I still act this way? Why do I have to do anything?" (sometimes I feel this way about pets too).

The child, though, is not Absurd as while he is acting "senselessly" he is not aware of his "senselessness". He is used here as a simple analogy of the questions of meaning that rise when we see something which is perceived as "senseless". And so the same feeling the passerby feels when he sees an Absurd character. The contrast between what is viewed as "meaningful" and "senseless" is brought about when the supposed senselessness is placed in the middle of the supposed meaningful.

What is he doing?

Becomes: What am I doing?

And then: What are we doing?

“I have chosen the most extreme ones. At this level the absurd gives them a royal power. It is true that those princes are without a kingdom. But they have this advantage over others: they know that all royalties are illusory.”²

“They are not striving to be better; they are attempting to be consistent. If the term “wise man” can be applied to the man who lives on what he has without speculating on what he has not, then they are wise men.”³

My business with these Absurd characters is to use them as collection of episodes: vignettes through which this chapter explores the characters of the Absurd and so characteristics of the Absurd.

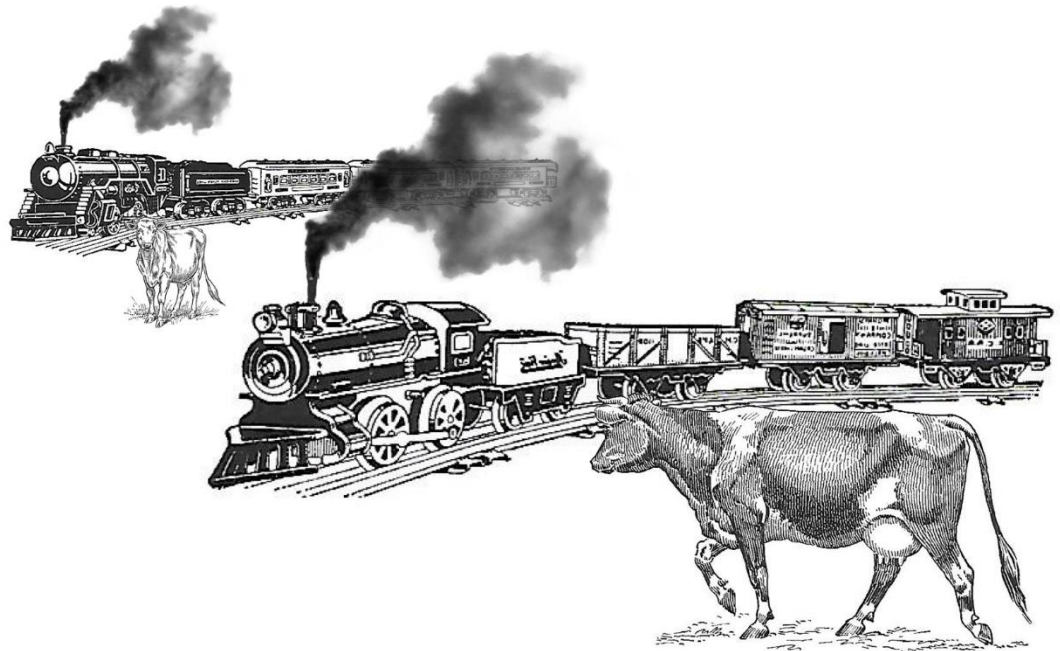


Figure 2.22, Cows and Trains.

² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 91.

³ *Ibid*, 91.

Bedroom 1: The Seducer

It is in Camus' writings of the Seducer where the differences between a character and a character of the Absurd becomes clearest. As Camus introduced the Seducer as his first character of the Absurd, so do I:

Sex is not a goal of the Seducer. Sex is a routine: a routine that is repeated infinitely and indefinitely, yielding neither a conclusion nor an equivocation. "Seducing is his condition in life"⁴. It is not the number of sexual acts alone which constitutes the Seducer as a character of the Absurd. It is rather the number of sexual acts paired with the circumstance that "he loves them with the same passion"⁵.

The Seducer does not keep track of the number of women he has seduced as this would imply reference to the past. He, and all characters of the Absurd, live entirely in the present—never regretting and never hoping. He uses the same strategies to seduce woman after woman, moving from woman to woman in the same manner, and never staying with one woman for too long. It is not that the Seducer leaves a woman because he loses interest in her. He leaves her simply because he becomes interested in another. The Seducer does not hope to find one, eternal love. He does not believe it exists, which does not bring about sorrow but conversely makes him laugh. In order for the Seducer to live exclusively for the lusts of the immediate moment, he must know the meaninglessness of each seduction and not look for any significance beyond that. This makes him a character of the Absurd. And this is not to say that all seducers are characters of the Absurd.

⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 72

⁵ Ibid, 69.

It is here, in Camus' description of the Seducer, via the idea of Don Juan, or "Don Juanism", that we understand the difference:

"What Don Juan realizes in action is an ethic of quantity, whereas the saint, on the contrary, tends toward quality. Not to believe in the profound meaning of things belongs to the absurd man. As for those cordial or wonder-struck faces, he eyes them, stores them up, and does not pause over them. Time keeps up with him. The absurd man is he who is not apart from time."⁶

"Don Juan can be properly understood only by constant reference to what he commonly symbolizes: the ordinary seducer and the sexual athlete. He is an ordinary seducer. Except for the difference that he is conscious, and that is why he is absurd."⁷

Bedroom 2: The Actor

The audience sits before a stage attempting to figure out what it is that the play means—why the actors are doing what they are doing. "The absurd man begins where that one leaves off, where, ceasing to admire the play, the mind wants to enter in. Entering into all these lives, experiencing them in their diversity, amounts to acting them out."⁸ The absurd actor upon the stage does not search for meaning in the play, or parallels it somehow to his own, personal life; rather, the absurd actor finds enjoyment through the experiences he demonstrates before his audience (who are, probably, trying to figure out what his character means).

Not all actors are this way; not all actors are Absurd. While not all actors may be absurd, Camus writes that the fate of all actors is "an absurd fate which might charm and attract a lucid heart. It is necessary to establish this in order to grasp without misunderstanding what will follow."⁹

It is not the quality of each life which pleases the absurd actor—he does not "hide" from his life by entering another to feel a sense of significance. The extent to which he carries these lives with

⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 72.

⁷ Ibid, 72.

⁸ Ibid, 77.

⁹ Ibid, 77.

him into his own life separates the actor among common streets from common people. Camus uses the example of the actor who has played Hamlet, “Occasionally when reaching for his glass he resumes Hamlet’s gesture of raising his cup.”¹⁰

“Always concerned with better representing, he demonstrates to what a degree appearing creates being. For that in his art—to simulate absolutely, to project himself as deeply as possible into lives that are not his own. At the end of his effort his vocation becomes clear: to apply himself wholeheartedly to being nothing or to being several.”¹¹

The absurd actor lives completely within the moment, for he is ephemeral. Though all fames are perceived to be such, the actor is especially so. He is continually taking on new roles, walking about convincing himself and everyone around him that the mask he’s wearing is his true face—all the while keeping the awareness that he is, actually, “pretending”. He walks in tension between believing the mask is real and knowing it is all faked.

The actor lives through several different lifetimes during his own lifetime; sometimes he relives the same lifetime over and over again. Both the actor’s life and the lives of those he acts out are dependent on the audience before them. Camus lends the example of the writer:

“An actor succeeds or does not succeed. A writer has some hope even if he is not appreciated. He assumes that his works will bear witness to what he was. At best the actor will leave us a photograph, and nothing of what he was himself, his gestures and his silences, his gasping or his panting with love, will come down to us. For him, not to be known is not to act, and not acting is dying a hundred times with all the creatures he would have brought to life or resuscitated.”¹²

A writer hopes to achieve his fame at some point in time, whether during his life or after he dies. The actor, however, knows that his fame is limited to his own life—as too is the fame of his character limited to the short hours from curtain open to curtain close. He may live free from the

¹⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 79.

¹¹ Ibid, 80.

¹² Ibid, 78.

desire to supersede his life with any significance toward the future. The actor is, therefore, absurd as he goes on stage and comes off of it with the consciousness that there is no further importance in that act outside the performance of it.

The actor's job is to turn his character entirely inside-out. He must take all parts of this life, even the most inner personal, private states, and render them comprehensible (though sometimes purposely complex) for the audience. And he must repeat this task over several different lives, all with the same body and voice as the last life. The actor removes the boundary between internal and external, leaving nothing unspoken as "But here silences must make themselves heard."¹³

Bedroom 3: The Rebel

The Rebel tell us,

"Conscious that I cannot stand aloof from my time, I have decided to be an integral part of it. This is why I esteem the individual only because he strikes me as ridiculous and humiliated. Knowing that there are no victorious causes, I have a liking for lost causes: they require an uncontaminated soul, equal to its defeat as to its temporary victories. For anyone who feels bound up with this world's fate, the clash of civilizations has something agonizing about it. I have made that anguish mine at the same time that I wanted to join in. Between history and the eternal I have chosen history because I like certainties. Of it, at least, I am certain, and how can I deny this force crushing me?"¹⁴

With revolt as recurring theme in Camus' work on the Absurdism, it is no surprise that the rebel is one of his characters who live the absurd life. Revolt is a crucial consequence of the absurd in that living with absurdity requires both simultaneous acceptance and rebellion. The rebel's ultimate struggle is thus not of conquering others, but of conquering himself. The actor has much in common with the rebel in that both their lives are fleeting. They can find comfort together in the recognition that in the "grand scheme" neither of them hope for posthumous fame.

¹³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 80.

¹⁴ Ibid, 87.

The rebel rebels with the absurd awareness that no conquer nor amount of conquering will heed meaning. Outside of the quest for meaning, Camus argues that the passionate, earnest revolt of the rebel extends beyond himself as an individual. This is so as the rebel maintains the belief in a “common good more important than his own destiny” and that there are “rights more important than himself.” The rebel acts “in the name of certain values which are still indeterminate but which he feels are common to himself and to all men”.¹⁵

The rebel knows that he is in a recurring state facing the absurdities of life; and so, he realizes his struggles might not be successful in overthrowing those forces he combats. Still, the rebel remains in a creaseless state of revolt—revolting against political forces and revolting against the absurdity which surrounds him: that each and all of his struggles, revolts, will make no lasting impression and so are, ultimately, meaningless.

Bedroom 4: The Artist

“Creating is living doubly. The groping, anxious quest of a Proust, his meticulous collecting of flowers, of wallpapers, and of anxieties, signifies nothing else. At the same time, it has no more significance than the continual and imperceptible creation in which the actor, the conqueror, and all absurd men indulge in every day of their lives. All try their hands at miming, at repeating, and at re-creating the reality that is theirs. We always end up by having the appearance of our truths. All existence for a man turned away from the eternal is but a vast mime under the mask of the absurd. Creation is the great mime.”¹⁶

Absurd art is not created with the hope to explain life, but only to describe life. It mimics only that which it is of—it does not profess higher meaning outside of what it is. “The absurd work requires an artist conscious of these limitations and an art in which the concrete signifies nothing more than itself.”¹⁷ The act of creation as the greatest mime delivers the artist as the greatest

¹⁵ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 15-16.

¹⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 94.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 97.

mimicker. The artist creates entire worlds which mimic that of our world or worlds. The artist recreates various pieces of life but knows that he can never *actually* add anything to it as “It will not yield to the temptation of adding to what is described a deeper meaning that it knows to be illegitimate.”¹⁸

The artist as an absurd man does not attempt to find any meaning or significance in his art for he knows it is impossible to find something which does not exist. He does not hope to serve a transcendent purpose and so his art, likewise, does not profess transcendence. Still, knowing this, the absurd artist is determined to make art. Limiting himself to merely describe the world separates the absurd artist from the artist who seeks to explain the world. Explaining is the effort to try to make sense of the world, which remains indifferent and unchanged. Camus tells us, “For the absurd man it is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing. Everything begins with a lucid indifference.”¹⁹

Bedroom 5 (Guest Bedroom): The Jester

While the seducer, actor, rebel, and artist are Camus’ examples of those who live the absurd life, there are other who live the absurd life as well. There is too the absurd life of the Shakespearean Fool: The Jester.

Roger Ellis tells us in his *The Fool in Shakespeare: A Study in Alienation* that “Of all the characters in literature, hardly any has a longer life, runs truer to type, and is of more lasting significance, than the fool.”²⁰ The character of the fool spans over several centuries from the ancient Pandarus to the tramps in the modern *Waiting for Godot* (Theater of the Absurd). Society

¹⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 97.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 94.

²⁰ Roger Ellis, “The Fool in Shakespeare: A Study in Alienation,” *Critical Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1968): 245-268.

may find through the inclusion of the fool, an outlet for its struggles and anxieties of “the way the world is”. While the fool makes us laugh out of his apparent stupidity, that which makes us laugh is “at the same time a profound criticism of the forces which have made him what he is.”²¹ The fool is an exaggeration of what is so wildly opposite societal values, pushing him at the fringes of society as an outsider. While society casts him and “his non-involvement of the society which he is a part, he is yet in his profound self-awareness and in his pity for those who suffer, its one hope for salvation.”²²

Society does not view him as this “salvation”, he is, to it, a man whose sole reason is to arouse laughter and amusement. As he enters in and out of scenes, he seems trapped within his own fantasy world, negligent to the structure and order society desperately professes. He in turn assures, through his silliness, that society is not silly, and is therefore correct. “So we laugh at Chaplin’s agonized incomprehension of a world of umbrellas, hats and lampposts that never seem to give *us* any trouble; we roar at Buster Keaton’s unawareness of the logic of existence, from which only benevolent nature rescues him.”²³

The fool rolling on stage, or slipping over banana peels walking down the street seem to be so only for mockery, assuring us that rolling and slipping are buffoonery and that we should not act this way. Yet, the fool persists to act that way.

All fools are studied from the outside as what we deem them to be as “No attempt is made to see why he is the fool, or what it means to him to be a fool, and why he is the fool, rather than the characters who represent a different world-view.”²⁴

²¹ Roger Ellis, “The Fool in Shakespeare: A Study in Alienation”.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Closing the Bedroom Doors: "Sweet Dreams"

A conclusion on the characters who live the absurd life:

"Let me repeat that these images do not propose moral codes and involve no judgements: they are sketches. They merely represent a style of life. The lover, the actor, or the adventurer plays the absurd. But equally well, if he wishes, the chaste, the civil servant, or the president of the Republic."²⁵

"I have chosen the most extreme ones. At this level the absurd gives them a royal power. It is true that those princes are without a kingdom. But they have this advantage over others: they know that all royalties are illusory."²⁶

Architecture is known to mirror human characteristics and emotions. If a design can relay happiness, sadness, fear—and be cheerful, painful, and fearsome—architecture can then be absurd, too.

²⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 90.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 91.

03. The Neighbor: Los Angeles

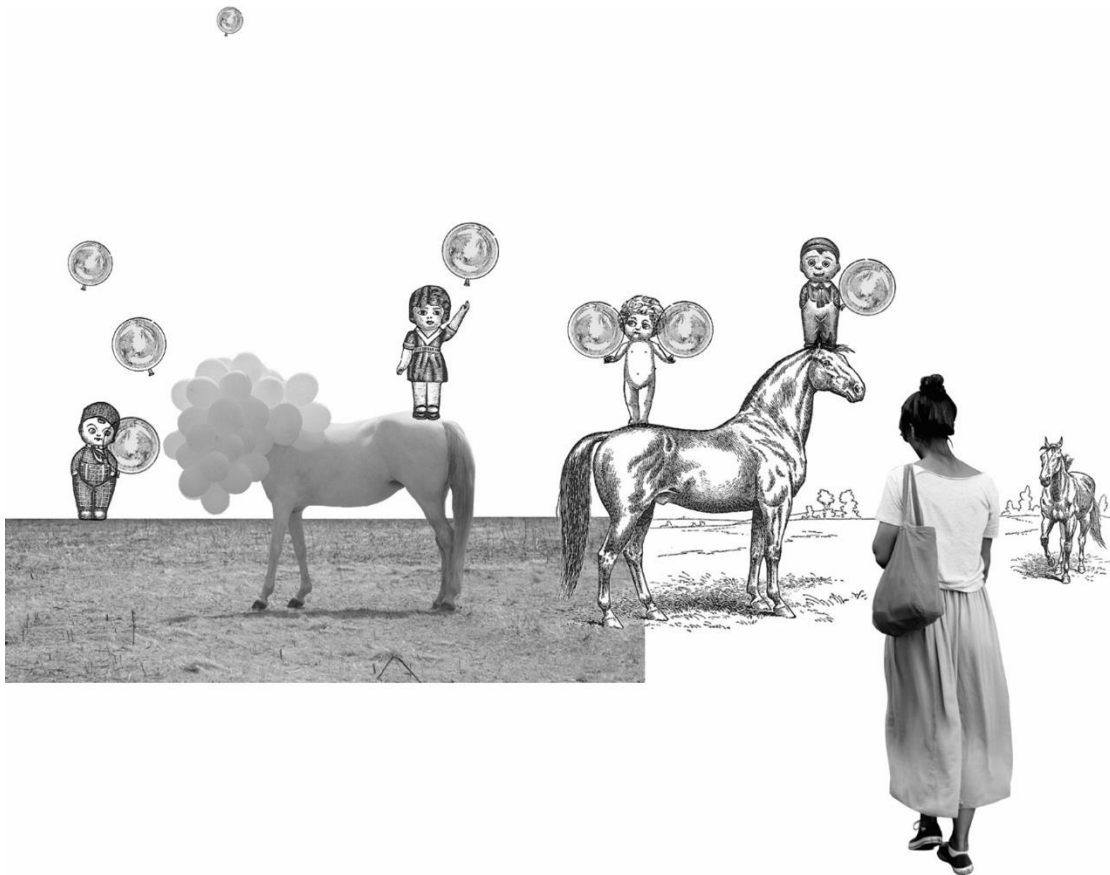


Figure 2.13, Welcome.

Pause

In the midst of my focused research, I take this pause here to imagine a potential architecture: a sort of branch which grows off the current body of work—lending shade and dropping fruit (I hope they're cherries). And while procrastinated (and truthfully unsolicited), it is an important pause to construct as the rabbit hole that is “architectural theory” lead me into my home-made mad tea party where I’ve found self-armistice and so might have never bid adieu to the comfort (or the cakes) of “inconclusive”. Now that I’ve taken the pause and realized myself in this dream, I brace myself for the pinch to come out of it—but I should be so careful that it is gentle enough to not completely come out of it.

Pinch.

Where am I?

Los Angeles was always one of those places I toured exclusively via the television, or while flipping through the tabloids as I stood in the grocery line. Yet here I find myself currently, 90039 to be exact—just east of Hollywood over the LA River. I am not sure what type of expression was on my face as the airplane flew over the city, but I what I do know about my expression was that it prompted the person next to me to say, “Don’t worry; it’s much greener as you get closer”.

Grey

Looking down at the LA aerial was like were looking down at a psychedelic tie-dye pattern of every color mixed with grey—an awe-inspiring amount of grey pushing far beyond the airplane window’s frame and fighting in every direction past my peripherals. The amount of information was shocking; but the grey alleviated the strain, rendering the LA aerial digestible.

Within this grey, I have found an inspiration: LA is my muse. The greyed colors of the city reinforce the idea that Los Angeles is just that: grey. It is neither black nor white, but a mixture of yes and no, right and wrong this and that— having no dedication to a particular identity, yet maintaining one of the most infamous identities amongst world cities. Of course, we all somehow know this. But still yet, the grey puzzles me: as a tourist to it, as I stand out in the middle of it, and as I try to make sense of it.

Los Angeles and its devoted Angelinos, though—they find refuge in it.

The grey is anonymous, a sort of magic trick really; it appears everywhere and nowhere at the same time. I imagine the part of the grey which is created: the concrete infinity, the pollution

trapped against the hills, or the reflections of the city onto itself via the glass windows of “making a living”. And a part which is experienced: the motion experienced through a vehicle resulting in the jump-cut, blurred, cropped and patched perception of Los Angeles. Both parts of the grey contribute to the overall scape of Los Angeles.

The grey as a filter exposes clearly: The Absurd. The created and resulting, together forming the grey, expose the Absurd through superposition of what we look for and what we find in Los Angeles and with that the desire to live within it. The grey inherently blurs the definitions and ultimately leaks the absurdities: the fleetingness and so senselessness of the city.

LA Absurd

It was almost as if I had it written on my forehead: “I am not from L.A.”—every Angelino I encountered would ask where I was from, already somehow knowing I was not going to respond with “L.A.”. To my surprise, however, near everyone I met was from L.A. or, at least, if not originally, they now identified themselves as Angelino. Even more surprising was that none of them ever have the intention of leaving—None.

My realization of the grey and its consequential blurred definitions brought forward the ephemeral Los Angeles. To be this close to world fames (that which we’ve all learned through media) and at the same time realizing that they are no more than those which can be found anywhere. Existence is a fleeting obsession in Los Angeles where life is a matter of that perhaps one day you can be in and the next day, or someday, you’ll surely right back out. It is a place where opportunity is abundant and located right next to skid row. L.A. professes a wealth of endless opportunities and at the same time warns of the rarity in which anyone should attain them. Amplified far beyond usual the promise, you can become “somebody” and remain

"nobody" simultaneously; and, knowing very well the absurdities of a life in Los Angeles, but wanting so desperately to live within it.

Take the classic Warholian statement: "I love L.A. I love Hollywood. They're beautiful.

Everybody's plastic -- but I love plastic. I want to be plastic."¹ Or Frank Lloyd Wright's one-liner:

"Tip the world over on its side and everything loose will land in Los Angeles."²

All this is magnified within the LA boundary; within a landscape which is perpetually manipulated over again to resemble another landscape and then another which is even more distant than the last.

Angelinos and the Absurdity They Live Against

When thinking of the characters who live the absurd life (the seducer, the actor, the rebel, and the artist) and where they might live in today's world, is it really that far of a stretch to imagine them walking alongside me in Los Angeles? Even further: How they interact with each other is a result of how they interact with their city and vice versa. So it would be that more of a stretch to imagine them built alongside me as well?

The role of these in Los Angeles, for Los Angeles?

The role of these in Los Angeles, for the Angelinos?

And how they use/interact with them?

¹ Ng, David. "Andy Warhol's Polaroid Predilection." Los Angeles Times. March 29, 2009.

² Tylevich, Katya. "Everything Loose Will Land." Domusweb.it. July 12, 2013.

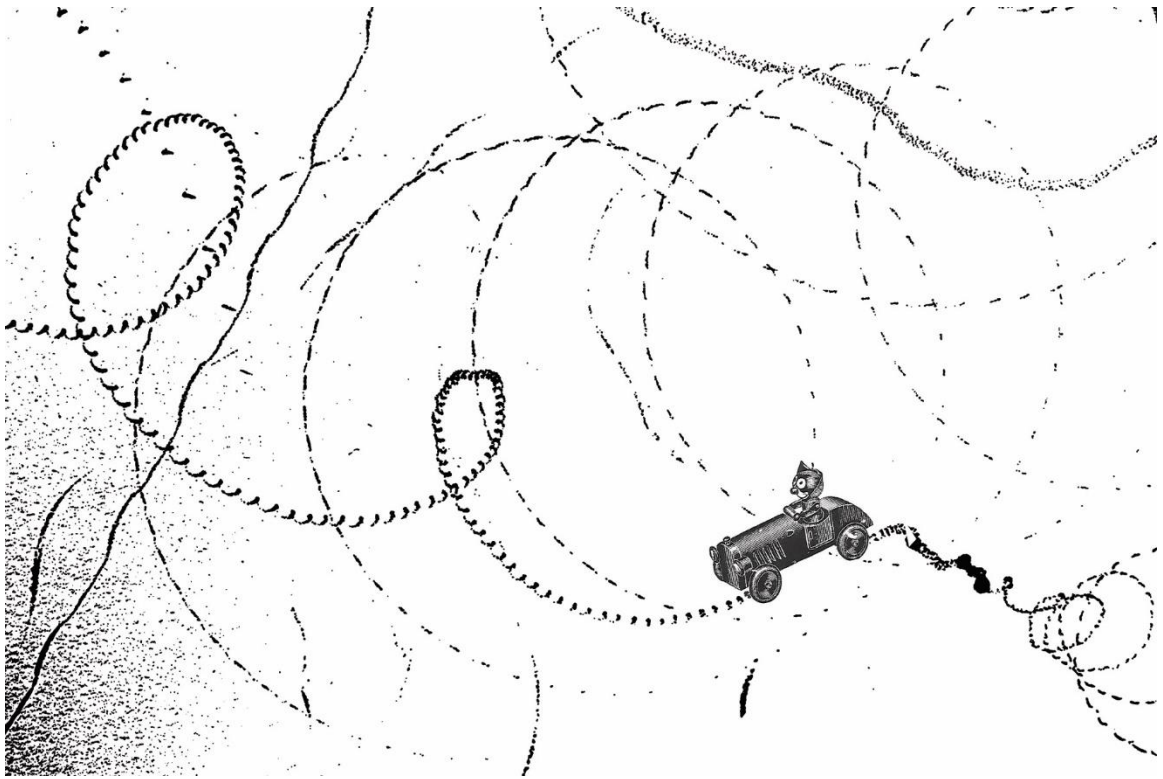


Figure 2.14, Abstract Experience 1.

I imagine the absurd seducers are the agents and their agencies who "make you feel like they're in love with you—that they want to date you and then suddenly you're nothing to them." But still they persist and still consider themselves musicians, still they struggle to "make it to the big time". Agents are the lovers everyone wants to lock down. But the agencies are indifferent, knowing that each person they offer a deal to will eventually fall out. Like the seducer, the agent knows the affairs in which he engages are only temporary. In the same light, take the LA Freeway. Just the thought of Los Angeles floods images of the infamous, massive 12 and 14 lane highways running, curving in every direction. Seducers are too the freeways, crossing over and through the city. They lend momentary use, remaining non-committal, and forever reaching for something else-- somewhere else.

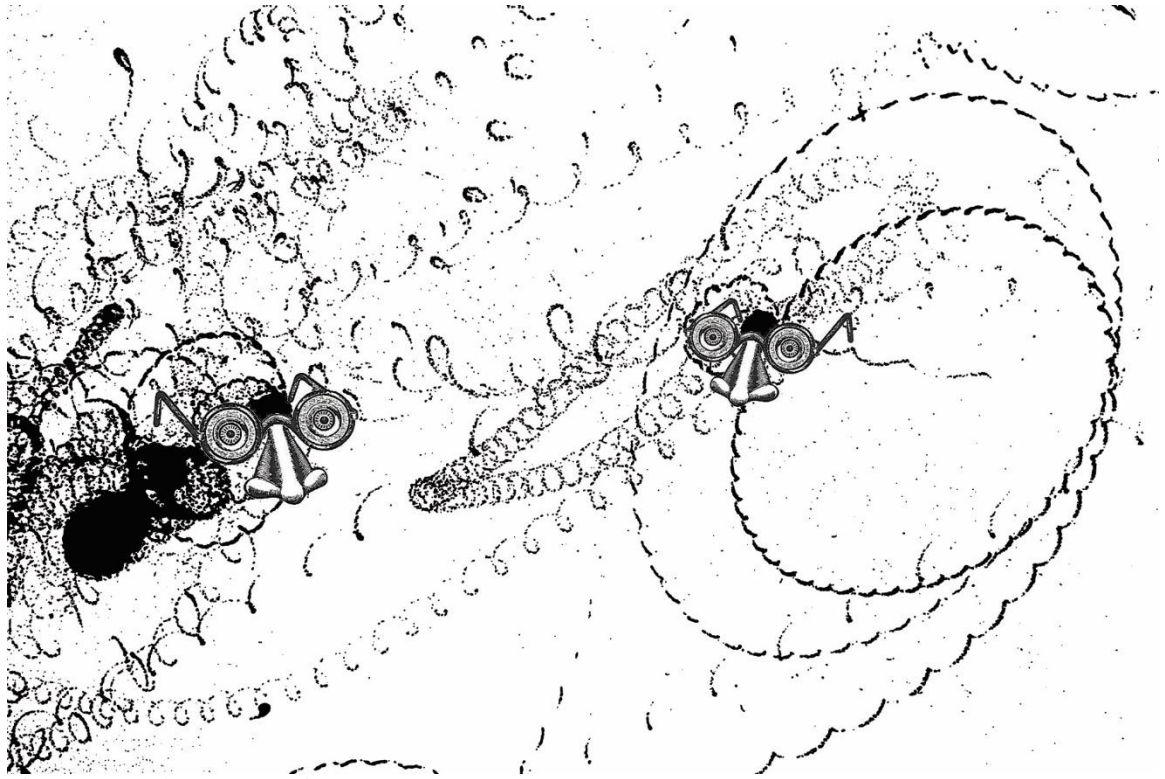


Figure 2.15, Abstract Experience 2.

Absurd actors are, of course, among the actors, who unrelatedly make up a huge population of Los Angeles' waiters and waitresses. Los Angeles' city scale actors are then the billboards: giant masks as screens opening portals into different worlds. These masks, like the actor's character, are short-lived. Just as the actor soon lives another life, the billboard soon lives another life. The same armature houses thousands of worlds, each accessible (while moving and still) through the oversized spectacle that is the billboard.

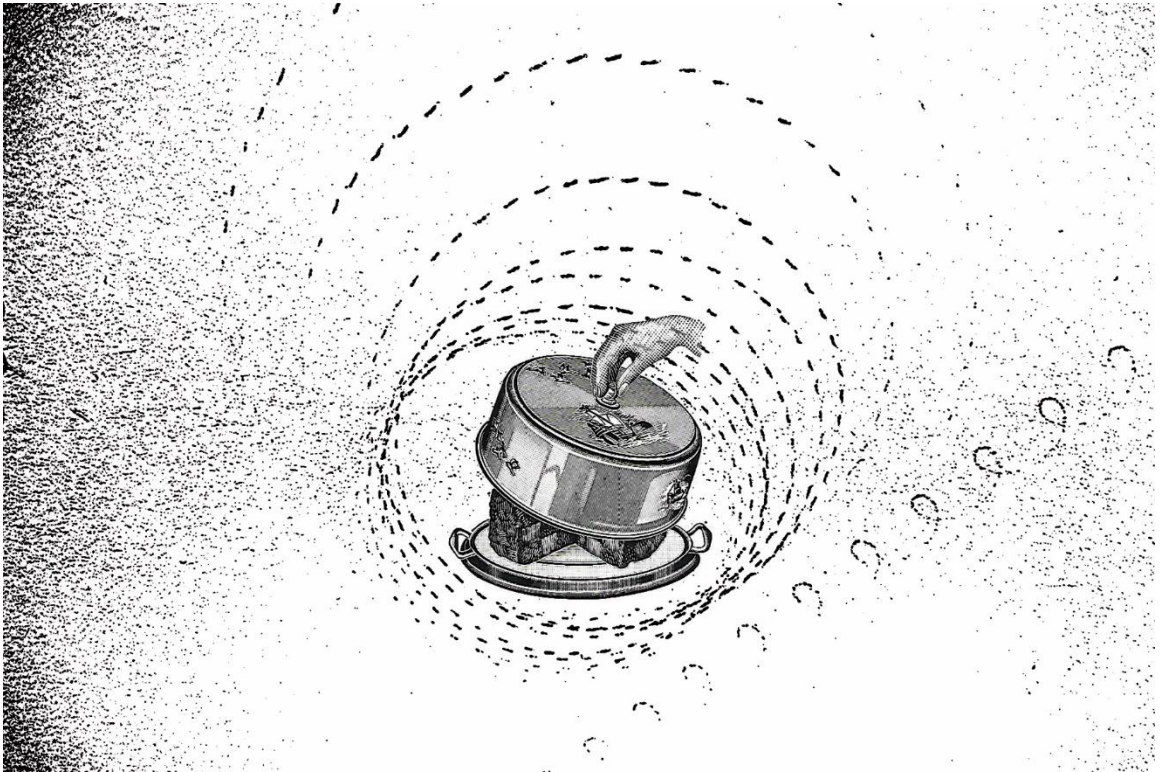


Figure 2.16, Abstract Experience 3.

And absurd artists are, of course, among the artists. And too among the mirrored glass with store signage in reflection as you see yourself walking down the street. Maybe the Angelino checks out their clothing, makes sure that their sunglasses look cool, and then sees themselves exactly as they are, reminded of the world they live in—through the mimicry of their lives.

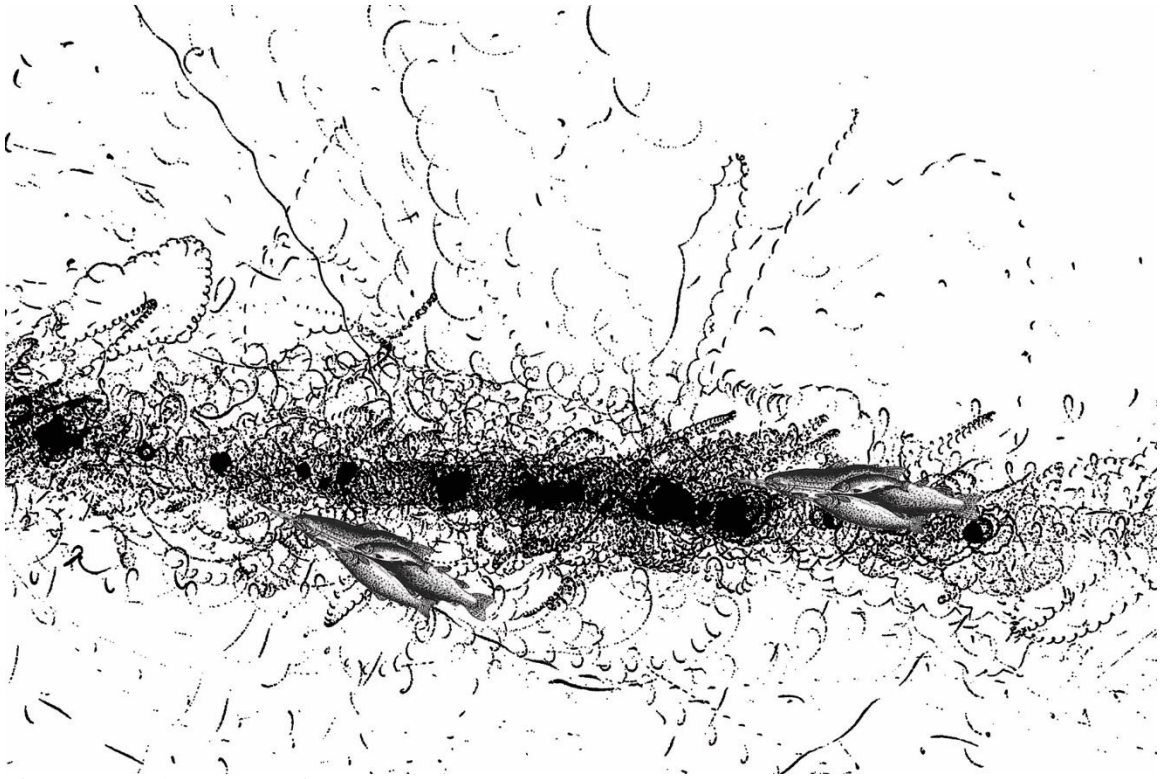


Figure 2.17, Abstract Experience 4.

The rebels though, they are all around me. They are those who live within all of it, knowing that they are outside of it. This brings us, relieved from the traffic, below to the L.A. River, which sits simultaneously within the city and outside the city. It sits within the city alongside the roads as you gaze upon the landscape at a distance, but when looking close-up it feels outside of the city as it is sunken below the roads and hardly visible when right beside it.

Realization of the Threshold

From these absurd design concepts (of the seducer, the actor, the artist, and the rebel), Los Angeles' freeways, billboards, facades, and river come forth as physical works which demonstrate the absurdity of our world. The idea of the freeway, a billboard, a façade, and the river each illustrate the absurdity which is non-committal, defining as a response to our lives but adding nothing to them—they are built knowing they are meaningless. The freeway is not a destination, it is forever in-between destinations; yet, it still exists indifferent to the cars (and number of cars) it carries and too the destinations to which it carries them. The freeway is used exclusively within the moment as a car is moving along it every second. Once the car is off it, it forgets it. It does not look for any meaning beyond itself and we don't look for any meaning beyond it. A billboard acts in this way too. Without the massive image, the billboard is a hollow armature. The billboard's condition is to at the same time be everything and ultimately be nothing. The facades of Los Angeles' are the mimes of the lives which pass by it. The ultimate mimicry, though, is the collection of facades combined, creating the greater city skyline. The L.A. River runs through this city skyline where it is fixed forever by its concrete structure. It was built sunken below the traffics of Los Angeles rather than the typical idea of building traffics above. And so the river exists outside of its city and within the city; its concrete pushes up against the other concretes. All of it in grey.

Using Camus' absurd characters as tools, I stand before the freeways, billboards, facades of Los Angeles, next to the L.A. River, and see the absurdity in them. From characters to Angelinos to these built L.A. works, my exploration leaves me this conclusion: The Los Angeles freeway, billboard, façade, and river are thresholds of the city. They exist as physical edges, defining and not explaining; perpetuating the absurdities in life through the experiences of "in-between" and "through".

Ah-hah!

The absurd can and does exist at the threshold.

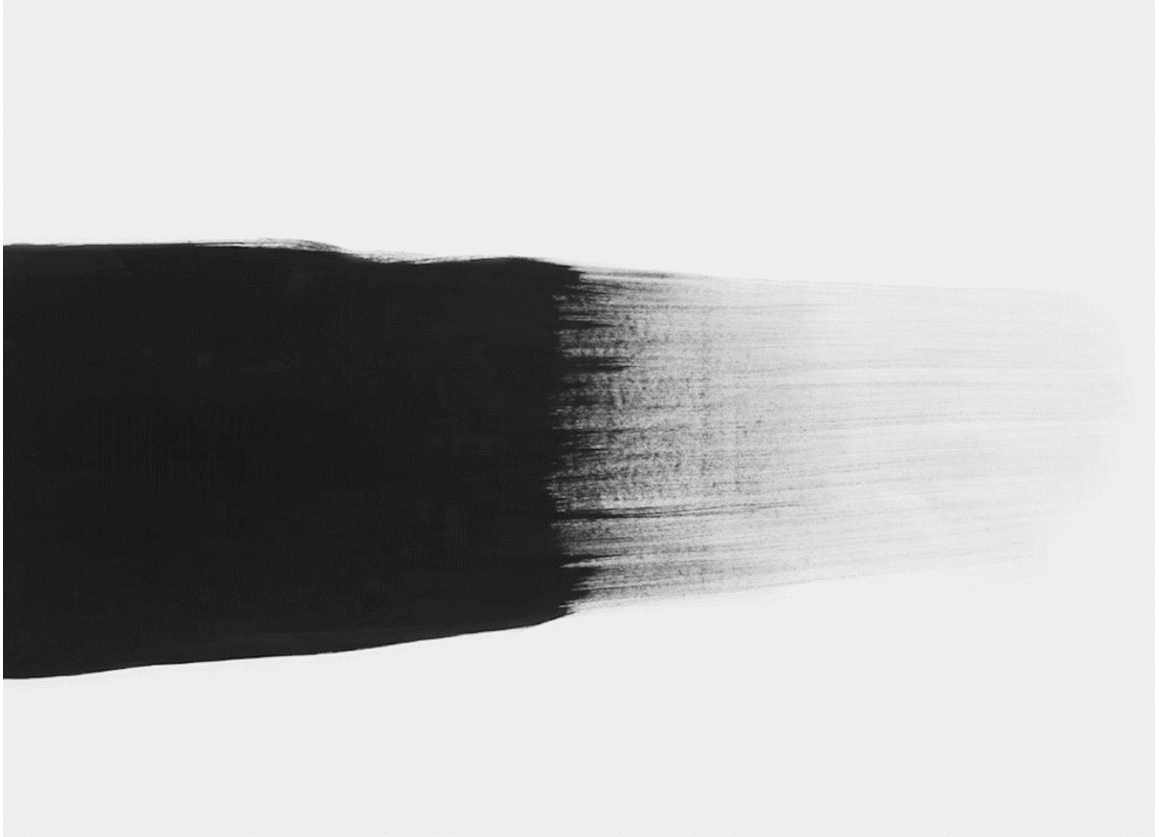


Figure 2.18, Realization of the Threshold.

04. The Hallway: The Threshold



Figure 2.19, Threshold of Blinds.

In-Between

A threshold is an “in-between”—like the hyphen there that joins “in” and “between”. It connects two things together. The threshold, therefore, it is defined only by that which it binds. Binding doubly in the sense of both pushing together and keeping separate at least two different entities. Even the period between sentences, for an additional literary illustration, binds the first and next sentence via the rule that once you cross over the period, you’re in a new thought. The golden word, none the less, is “between”: a point which indicates some kind of change.

The Perceived and Yet to be Perceived

The threshold, or between-ness, is defined by the edges of the liminality. The edges, though, are up for interpretation. I imagine if a group of people we instructed to trace a threshold (like on a map, for example) each result would undoubtedly have a set of rational edges, yet the shapes of the traced images may vary. This is a result of the “blur” which we find adjacent to the threshold, making it so any point within this blur could be considered an edge to the threshold. This “blur” is a major quality of the threshold, granting the term it’s elusiveness and explanation simultaneously. Take into consideration the idea of “Honey, I’m home!” Are you home the moment your car tires roll onto the driveway, or are you home once you step foot into the door? Or are you home once your honey can hear you say that you’re home? The boundary is blurred. Not limited to the house itself, “home” could extend to the property, the town, the state, and so on.

Threshold, in physical, exists as an x, y, z: the x where we may pass through the axis in east and west; the y where we may pass through north and south; the z where we may pass through perpendicular to the x and y axis along a line between a device and the center of the Earth, like in an airplane. The threshold can be can therefore be defined by the coordinates of each endpoint of the line (x,y,z) where the x, y, and z acts as the edges or limits of the threshold.

“The threshold separates that which is perceived from that which is yet to be. What we perceive is light on surfaces, and the edge illuminating form; what is not perceived is beyond the edge, within varying shades of shadow, and the ground and receiver of our projected self.”¹ While the physical edges of the threshold may be up for individual presumptions, so is, of course, the psychological edges of the threshold. Crossing a threshold brings about a moment of self-

¹ Brett Matthew Wilbur, *At the Threshold: Liminality, Architecture, and the Hidden Language of Space*. (Austin: University of Texas Libraries, 2013).

realization when we understand that the physicality of our self has moved, and so moved is our mindset and awareness of where we were then and where we are now versus where we were when we were neither in that place nor this space: in a neither here nor there.

And while any in-between space demonstrating the change in place/space can be argued a threshold, (i.e. the several literary examples mentioned above), the difference then is the act of crossing the threshold: the experience of the in between—something which gives us the self-realization or self-awareness of where we were and where we are going.

The Airplane and the Birthday Party

Take the example of the airplane, where traveling from Honolulu to Los Angeles, the ocean is a threshold and the airplane the container within we pass this threshold. Where are we then? In the plane over the ocean? We would say "I'm in the airplane flying across the ocean between Honolulu and Los Angeles" (roughly). Imagine the little screen some of us are reluctant to see as we enter the plane searching for our seat. On that screen displayed are two points: a point of departure and a point of arrival. And while it is the airplane which carries us from destination to destination, it is the body through which the threshold is crossed where internally we understand that externally we are now somewhere new. All the while the interior of the airplane remained constant, including the little screen inches from our face.

Perhaps instead you have a window seat, watching the views outside understanding that you are not anywhere exactly- you are in motion. Defined by the edges of the window and the points on the map. Then the pilot beings a countdown to how long until we land and we think about the amount of time we need to get through.

"One hour left."

"Half hour left."

"Stow away larger electronics such as laptops or portable DVD players."

"Flight attendants prepare for landing."

You landed just in time for the party.

A birthday marks the one-year anniversary since the last birthday and so the very first birthday ever or even before the first birthday which is ironically not the first "birthday" but the day of birth. We then recognize it (in the American way) via balloons and cake and presents, which confirm we have crossed the threshold from one year to another, defined by the number we said last year to the new number we say this year. This threshold of time is then defined by the tick marks along the line to which we then look back on in reminiscence of where we were before compared to where we are now.



Figure 2.20 Edges of Stairs.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/scfiasco/>

The same phenomenon occurs when walking up the stairs or along a path. The end destination anticipated. The stairs function as a threshold to the place we are headed. Although current trends in architecture aim to use the steps as destination lunch stops— Photoshop-ping people in the renderings who are using the steps as a social place, sitting and eating ice cream together (although there is no cream retail in the building program nor in the adjacent programs). Yet it is still not the stairway which is the destination (despite the expression "meet me on the stairs"), but rather the step itself which you mutually agree is clean enough and far enough away from pedestrian traffic to sit on. Then, upon standing and moving, the steps collectively return to the staircase and act as a tool to return back into the office building.

We rarely ever look down at where we are walking since we've got to keep our heads up to see where we are in relationship to what's around us. We may occasionally look down at other's feet, maybe to check out their shoe choice or to indicate exactly how far away that person is from us. But otherwise, it's strictly heads up and looking forward. The threshold under our feet in real-time is therefore is hardly ever realized and most always goes unnoticed. Unless, of course, we trip or we feel something foreign under our feet. The edge, instead, is in our sight: the building we are headed to. And perhaps we notice the threshold via the amount of time we estimate it'll take us to cross and get to that building.

“Edge-ness, is a description of inter-relationships between the physical and metaphysical, and between the animate and inanimate; between people, buildings, landscapes, concepts, and emotions. It is both a descriptor of a condition of physical containment and a meta-physical relationship between object and event, between physical attribute and phenomenological experience.”²

“Edge-ness therefore is also a non-condition, or rather, a space of no space. It is neither the form nor the act; it is the transition between differing states of being. It is in this very transition that the most striking and powerful action of the edge is revealed. Its dynamism as a ‘threshold’ between varying states that makes manifest the ‘embodiment of becoming’ and denotes the edge as a site of flux and indeterminacy.”³

Architecture of X / Y

The above text only touches the surface of endless examples of thresholds. The thresholds most relevant to this work are none other than those existing within and "in-between" architecture which we experience through the here/there.

The most introductory of the thresholds within architecture are those which deal with the idea of entering and exiting. The threshold between entering and exiting is most simply represented by the concept (and physicality) of the door.

² Chris Brisbin, *Drawing Out the 'Anatomy of the Edge': In-between-ness in the Verandas of South-East Queensland @ the Edge* (Victoria: Association of Architecture Schools of Australasia, 2011).

³ Ibid

The door is the universal symbol of entering and exiting, which finds scale within the wall. How small or how big the door is directly affects how small or big the wall is and vice versa. The door could carve out only a sliver into the wall, giving the wall the dominate presence as a barrier and the sliver an importance of its own. The door could also be the entire wall, opening the wall entirely into a door (we may ask then which is door and which is wall? And thus find that the two are dependent on each other). Still, in both cases the threshold remains, defining entrance and exit for the space through its function to determine: what is inside/outside; what is public/private, what is here/there.



Left Figure 2.21, Constructed Edges.

Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/112097478194978898/>



Right Figure 2.22, Pressure Edges.

Source: <http://taoofsophia.com/brick-wall/>

Inside and outside are determined by the idea that if you are inside something, then you are not outside that something. The threshold between the two serves to illustrate where the inside is and where the outside is. Take, for instance, the idea that inside is to the right and outside is to the left. If you are in the right, you are out of the left and therefore if you are in the left, you are out of the right. The “in” and “out” are variables where the threshold is a constant. Just as one may exit out of something, she exits into something: “I’m leaving home, I’m leaving for California.” The ins and outs become especially important in Architecture. What is in the building and what is outside of the building inform near the entirety of the design.

A threshold may also determine the edges between that which is private and that which is public. Take, for example, the classroom. The classroom consists of two major spaces: the student area, consisting of rows of desks toward the back, and the teacher area, consisting of the chalkboard, podium, and teacher’s desk all stationed toward the front of the room. In the simple idea of desks versus the podium, it is understood that once you pass the last row of student desks, you are now in the teacher’s realm where things may seem more quiet and the rules of behavior are different. Even the air of the front row of desks closest to the teacher’s desk is far different than the back row furthest away. While technically the entire classroom (and so entire school for that matter) is considered public, the desks vs the podium setting demonstrates an internal public/private condition.

Architecturally, the public and private threshold may be established by the transparency/lack of transparency between two spaces. Transparency used here to mean doubly: the materiality as well as the accessibility. Transparency in materiality refers to the ease in which one may see-through to the other side with the accepted notion that if you can see so easily inside, whatever is in inside is okay with you seeing it—or even encourage your seeing it. Transparency as it pertains to accessibility is the ease in which you (or anything for that matter) can get through with the

accepted notion here that if it's open and you can just walk right over, whatever is over there is okay with you being there—or even encourage you to do so.

All of the previous contributes to the idea of “here” or “there”. We experience this internally by thinking “I am here” or “I am there”. We also experience this externally as we reference that which is around us as either being here, next to me, or there, far from me; i.e. “that is here” or “that is there”.

The ideas of inside/outside, private/public, and here/there are otherwise references to each other in a dualistic relationship. The threshold is not simply a line in which one crosses over from here to there, it is the edge *between* the two—where the here and there intersect. You can therefore never be in or on a threshold, you can only be AT the threshold where the inside is here and the outside is there.

05. The Front Entry: Threshold Studies

Around Us

“Therefore the first progressive step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things is to realize that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men and that human reality, in its entirety, suffers from the distance which separates it from the rest of the universe. The malady experienced by a single man becomes a mass plague. In our daily trials rebellion plays the same role as does the “cogito” in the realm of thought: it is the first piece of evidence. But this evidence lures the individual from his solitude. It finds its first value on the whole human race. I rebel—therefore we exist.”¹



Figure 2.23, “Glendale” (2014).

Source: <http://purple.fr/article/alex-prager/>

¹ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

Analysis of the threshold is an infinite task. This work does not claim to nor aspire to define, in whole, the concept of the threshold; but, rather to explore within the limitless possibilities of what a threshold is through a limit to the following four concepts: below us, beside us, above us, before us. “Not to be confused with the novice approach to designing entrances and portals, but as ways of addressing edges, surfaces, and transitional spaces within.”²

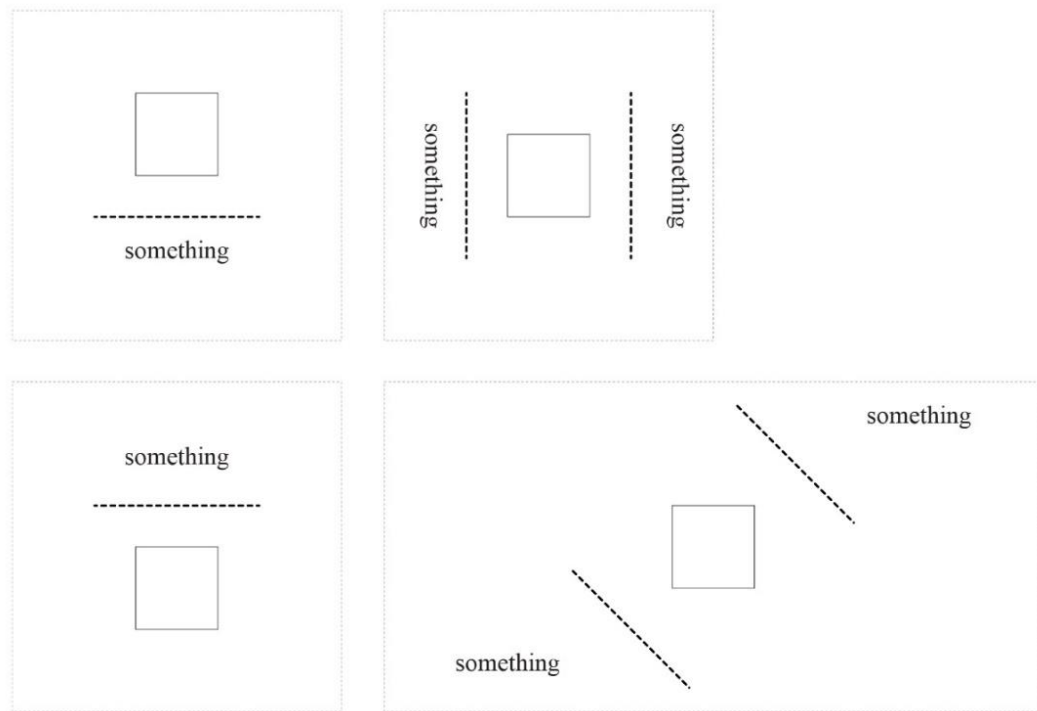


Figure 2.24, Below Us; Beside Us; Above Us; Before Us.

² Brett Matthew Wilbur, *At the Threshold: Liminality, Architecture, and the Hidden Language of Space*. (Austin: University of Texas Libraries, 2013).

Below Us

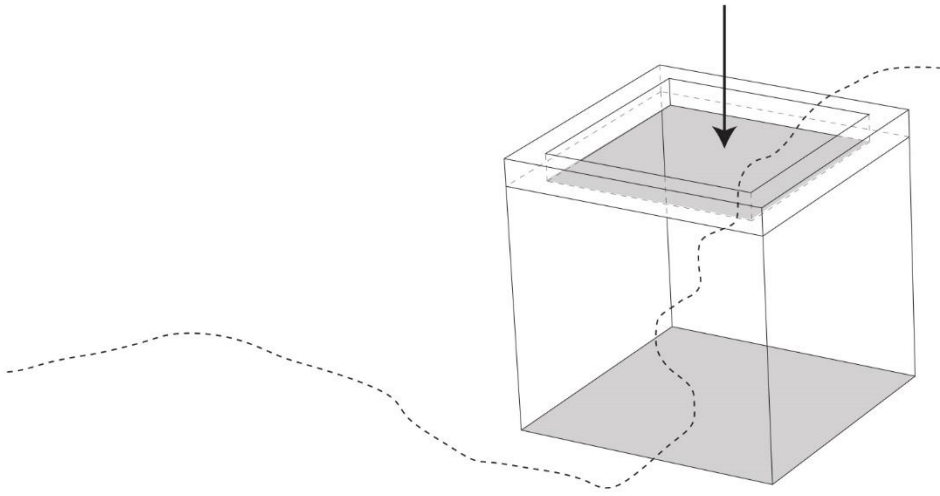


Figure 2.25, *Below Us*.

The threshold below us is defined by the span of surface, which is loosely used here to represent the spatial extent and material. The span of paving spreads until it reaches a point of another threshold (such as a different path) or a destination (such as a building) or its “boundary”. We can determine the threshold in the change of the paving, which is represented by the materiality.

As we walk along a concrete path in the park, the edges where the concrete meet the blades of grass represents the boundary of the threshold between the grass area and the concrete area. It is understood that if you step off the concrete and onto the grass, you are in a different space within the park. On the grass you may do several activities, all of which you would not feel completely comfortable doing on the concrete path. The texture of that which is below plays a key role as well. The grass is not only a blatantly different color than the concrete, it is also an incredibly different texture. The juxtaposition of such colors and textures fortifies the threshold existing in-between the two surfaces. Change in texture alone, sans color, would work just as effectively. Perhaps further along the concrete path, the grass turns slowly into a bed of gravel, matching the

color of the concrete seamlessly. Even a step off the smooth concrete into the rough, unstable gravel is a step through a threshold—the threshold now defined by the edge of the concrete meeting the gravel. Suppose the grass alongside also transitions into gravel, where bits of the gravel mix with the grass, slowing moving in a gradient from grass to gravel on one side and gravel to grass on the other: making the threshold larger and more ambiguous.

Gravel	Gravel	Gravel	Gravel	Concrete
Gravel	Gravel	Gravel	Gravel	Concrete
Gravel	Grass	Gravel	Grass	Concrete
Grass	Gravel	Grass	Grass	Concrete
Gravel	Grass	Grass	Gravel	Concrete
Grass	Grass	Grass	Grass	Concrete
Grass	Grass	Grass	Grass	Concrete

In addition to color and texture, there is also displacement that happens below us which illustrates a threshold. This displacement is most commonly noted by a step or series of steps. Out of the park and into a home: we walk through the front door (a threshold beside us) and walk into the entry way. As we walk further, we see a step and take the step down to then realize that we are no longer in the entryway, but now into a different space within the home— more specifically into the formal living room, I imagine.

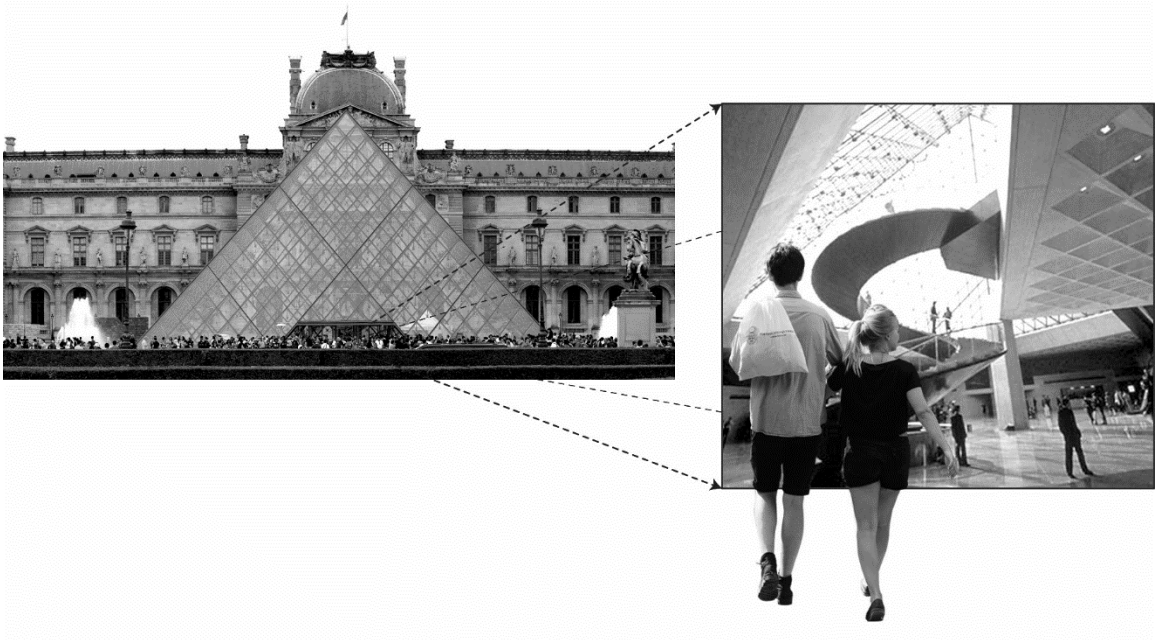


Figure 2.26, The Grand Louvre (Paris, France 1989).

The well-known addition to the Louvre (1989) done by iconic architect IM Pei, features the transparent pyramids structured of steel filled with glass. Stunning in contrast to the historic palace surrounding it, the pyramids locate the threshold between the upper and below ground inhabitable spaces. A typical threshold which calls attention to the below us is done through the physical implication of defending below. From the upper garden and central courtyard of the palace, the visitor may enter within IM Pei's central pyramid only to cross the threshold between ground level and the ground level revealed below us. Upon sight of the void revealing the underneath and then descending to the underneath, we perceive that which is below us.

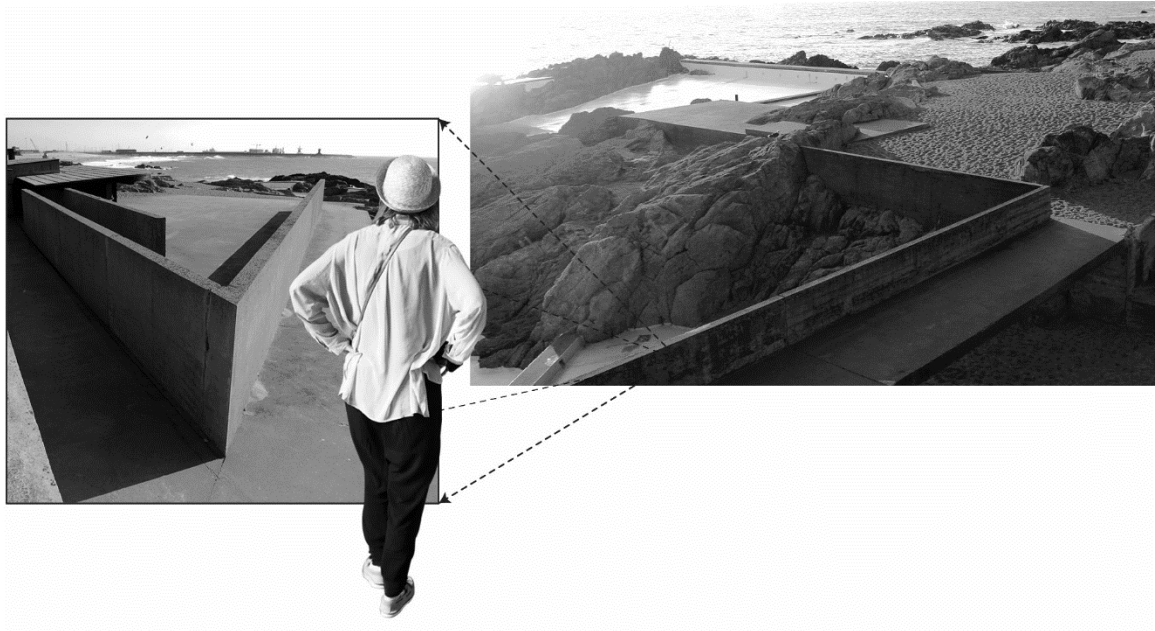


Figure 2.27, Leça Swimming Pools (Leça de Palmeira, Portugal 1966).

Different to IM Pei's realization of the below threshold through the void between, Alvaro Siza's Leça Swimming Pools (1966) call attention to the below us threshold is demonstrated through the texture changes of the ground surface through varying materials (in addition to the physical descent to the below). One of his greatest earlier works, the Leça Swimming Pools includes a sunken complex (changing rooms and cafe) in addition to the two swimming pools. Considering the appreciation of the ocean view via the drive alongside, the building is set below the adjacent road, near totally hidden from the roadside view. The pools are then relieved alongside the building down below to the ocean's edge. Siza incorporates the natural rocks, sand, and ocean with his man-made concrete. The boundaries between the natural and his man-made materials define the thresholds. In addition to the hide-and-seek play between ocean and pool, the surfaces constructed (concrete) and the landscape of the beach (rocks and sand) play together as the concrete walls flow around the rocks and concrete ramps flow into the sand. These design techniques call attention to that which is below us where the thresholds between man and nature are respected, crossed, and enjoyed.

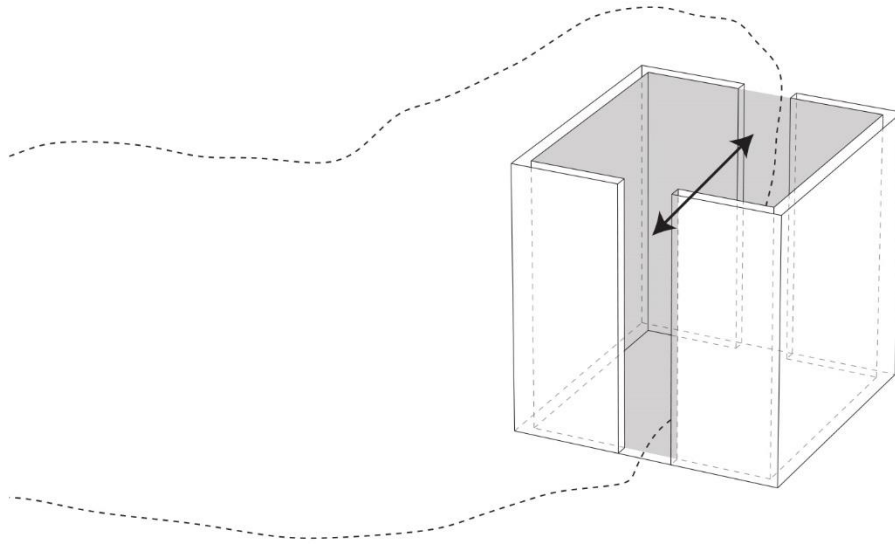


Figure 2.28, *Beside Us*.

The threshold beside us is first represented by that front door we entered through in the above section (after our stroll in the park). The thresholds which exist beside us are extruded off the ground, off the surfaces, and find form in their therefore attained vertical nature. These are the more famous architecture gestures such as the door, the window, and the wall.

Merriam-Webster tells us the definition of a threshold is firstly: “the plank, stone, or piece of timber that lies under a door: sill”, a threshold which exists below us; and secondly: “gate, door”, a threshold which exists besides us. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threshold>) In either the first or second definition, the idea of the door as a foundational threshold is evident (and having both definitions back to back make it even more so—thanks, Mer).

The idea of a door itself is one of many interpretations. There is the most obvious image of a door, consisting of a rectangular piece of wood, three hinges, and a doorknob, which has even several interpretations of its own. Aside from the limitless materials it could be made of, the door

could be swinging, sliding, rotating, lifting, folding, and what have you. There is, better yet, the thematic conception of the door: the doorway. The doorway summarizes all possibilities of the door with the simple idea that it is just that: a "way". Independent from material and motion, the door in all forms serves as the doorway, or threshold, through which we most simply recognize the transition between space A and space B.

The window then is similar to the door, but instead of a physical movement of body through the threshold, we experience through the threshold: change in our environment via elements permitted to enter through to us (i.e. sunlight, wind, noise, smells, etc.). While we do not go in and out through the window (not generally, at least), the window is still a threshold between two spaces through which we witness change and consequence from outside to in and vice versa. My neighbor would back me up on this as he yells at me weekly about my music being too loud and that I need to close my windows.

The threshold isn't always one which you may pass through, but can be realized as a boundary between two parts through which you may not pass. This brings us shoulder to shoulder beside the wall. The wall alone can act as a threshold in-between two spaces that fortify the idea that there are in fact two different spaces separated by this solid threshold. Two walls together, however, can create a secondary type of threshold where the walls become edges and the space between them becomes the threshold. This idea is manifested in the design of the hallway, or the tunnel, where you walk in-between a pair of walls in-between two places.

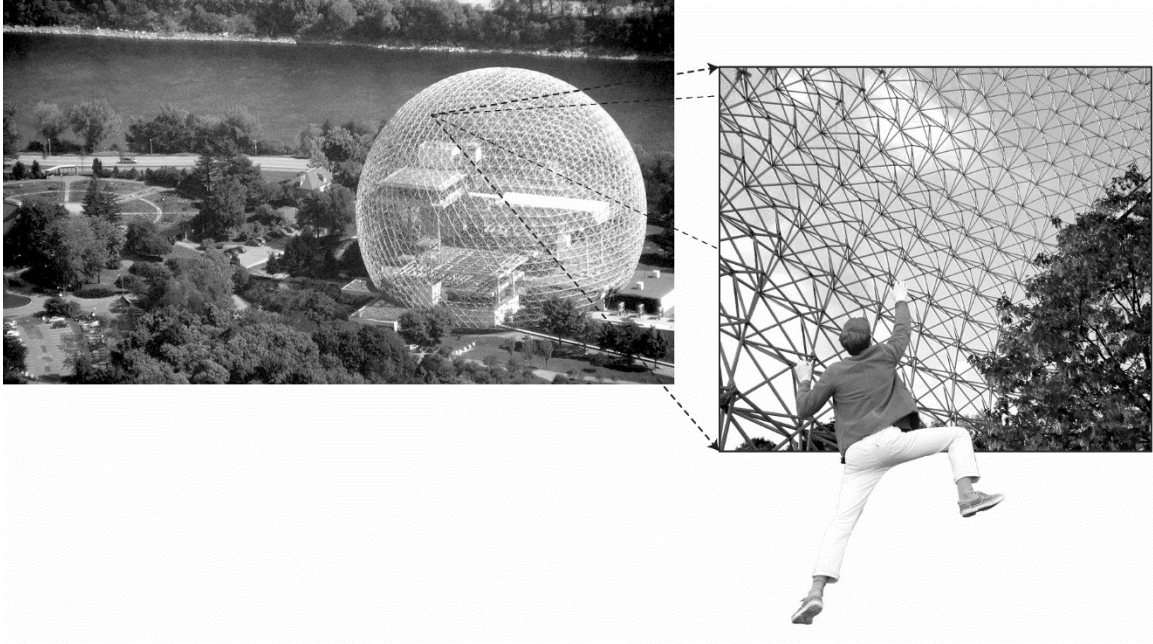


Figure 2.29, Biosphere (Montréal-Quebec, Canada 1967).

Built with the concept that only architects could comprehend the complexities between social, technological, and environmental responsibilities, Buckminster Fuller's Biosphere (1967) experiments with the betweenness of man and nature. While Fuller built several geodesic domes, his Biosphere stands alone as a seventy-six-meter icosahedron (20 sided shape). The structure is created from a sequence of 3-inch steel equilateral triangles welded together. The design was originally filled with seemly opaque material, contributing to a more solid looking dome; however, after a fire in 1976 burned the acrylic material, the structure now sits in a nearly transparent state. Fuller's Biosphere is an example of the threshold beside us as it calls attention to just that: what is beside us. And what is beside us is this massive geodesic dome, which serves as the boundary between.



Figure 2.30, Le Cylindre Sonore (Paris, France 1987).

Similar to Fuller's Biosphere, Bernhard Leitner's Le Cylindre Sonore, the beside threshold is defined through the in-between of man and nature (however, it is coincidental that both examples shown are curve-oriented designs). Leitner tells us, "While these boundaries are elementary, they cannot convey the complete adventure of architecture. Through its very essence the inside formulates an outside."³ Leitner's Le Cylindre Sonore goes beyond the perceived limits of architecture into the experience of sound which resonates from the surrounding environment and travel within his built work. The thresholds beside us in Leitner's work establishes a clear distinction of the beside us threshold as the design realizes the threshold between the outer and inner through the simple use of extruded walls, but also turn uses those walls to strengthen the threshold through their amplification of sounds. He fortifies our distinction of the threshold acting beside us through a design which closes us off from the outside (with limited views of it through the lateral voids and vertical void) through the physical space and made sound space—with this we recognize that which is beside us and so displaces us.

³ Lopez, Oscar. "AD Classics: Le Cylindre Sonore / Bernhard Leitner." ArchDaily. September 13, 2011.

Above Us

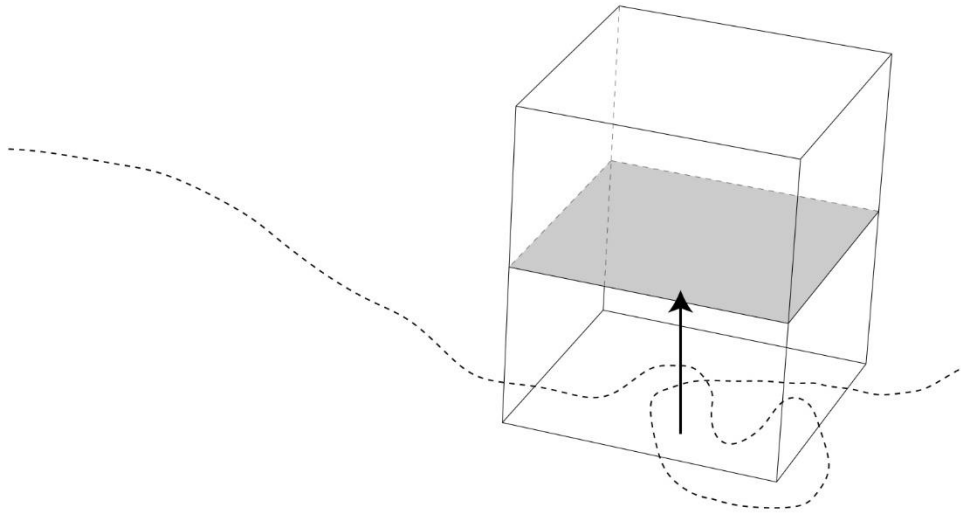


Figure 2.31, Above Us.

You either choose to walk under the scaffolding or to walk around it (sometimes choosing to brave the street over risking the off-chance of a freak scaffolding accident). Either way, a decision is made from the acknowledgement of the threshold which the scaffolding above us outlines. Choosing to be under any sort of overhang or awning has the same (yet slightly less worrisome) effect. If you are walking under an overhang and step to the side or away from the overhang, a change is noticed— all experienced via the threshold above you, in-between you and the ground plane. The above threshold may also contribute (like the wall) to a secondary threshold being the space underneath from which you noticeably enter in and exit out of. This is demonstrated through that feeling of getting warmer from the sunshine as you step out of the thresholds (that which you are in and under) or getting cooler as you step back through the thresholds and so into the shade. The same effect is felt if it is raining, where you are either outside getting wet or within the umbrella keeping dry—if you stand half way, half of you will get wet and half of you will stay dry. The above threshold may also perhaps even alter your view—closing it, making you feel safer or expanding it, making you feel somewhat smaller and less significant.

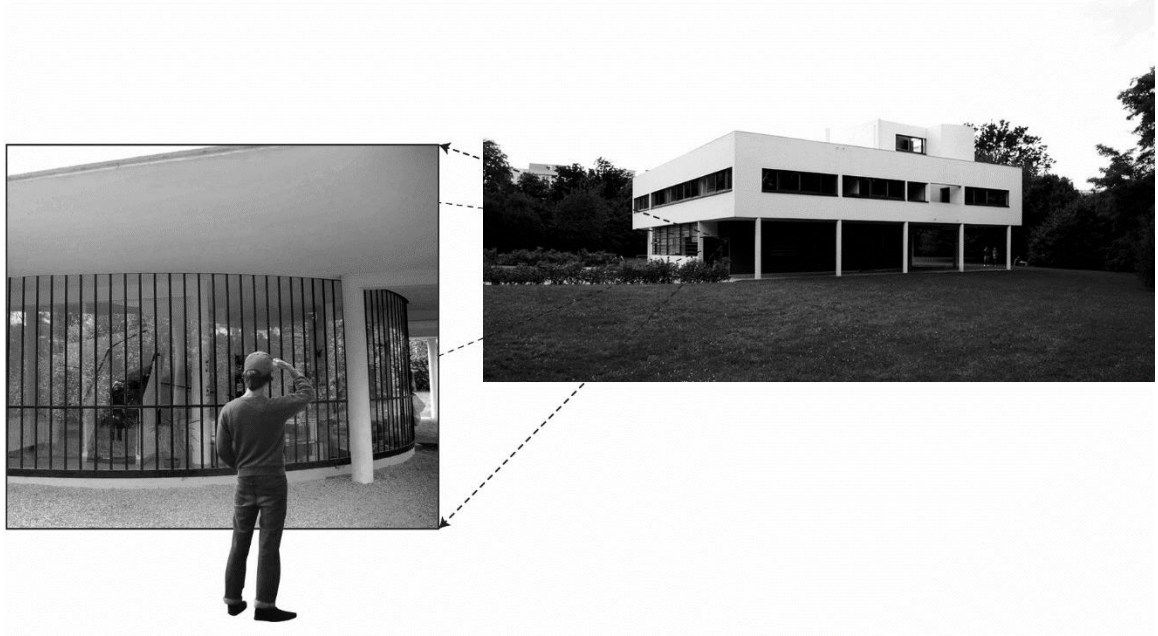


Figure 2.32, Villa Savoye (Poissy, France 1929).

Le Corbusier's pilotis of his famed "Five Points" of Architecture exhibits the idea of the threshold above us. His Villa Savoye (1929) is iconic for the composition of each of these five points and clearly displays the use of the pilotis. The pilotis serves to support the upper spaces, but too contributes to creating the lower space beneath the house. And so, the pilotis addresses the threshold of that which exists above us as we stand between the edges of the ground and the edges of the upper levels.

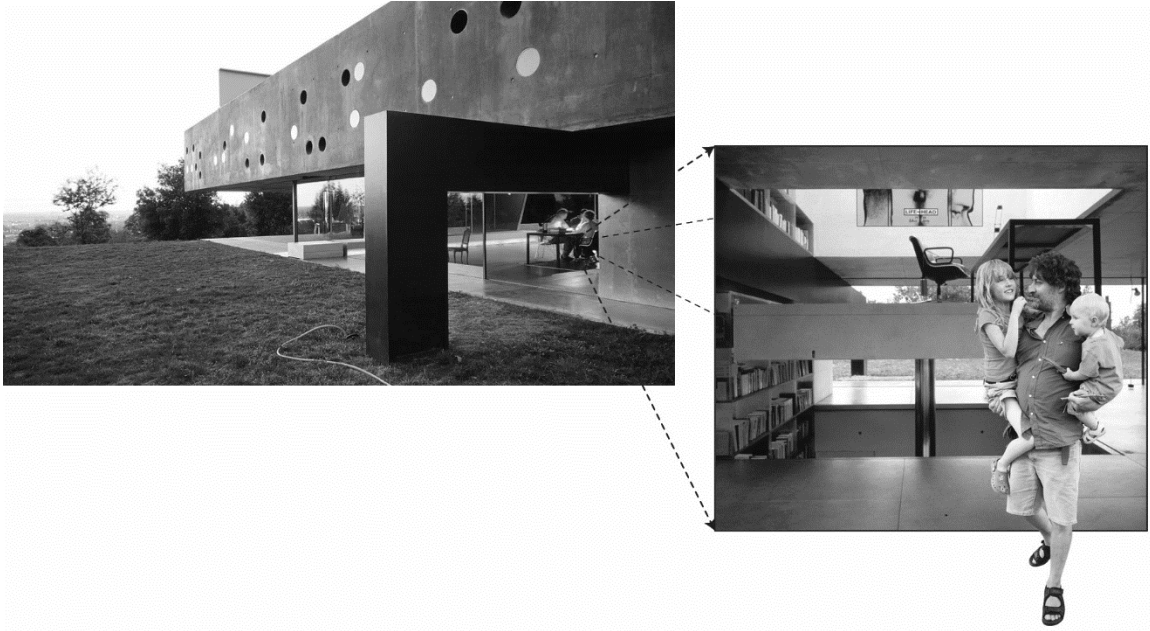


Figure 2.33, Maison Bordeaux (Bordeaux, France 1998).

Rem Koolhaas' Maison Bordeaux (1998) consists of three levels: the lower level, a weighty mass sunken within the hillside; the middle level, enclosed with glass; the upper level, a weighty mass raised above the landscape. The lower and upper levels act in a sandwiching manner which articulate the boundaries of the middle space. The above threshold is expressed here between the middle and upper masses within the sandwiching: the experience between the heavy, solid quality of the upper floor above and the solidity that is the earth which spans surrounding in view. All this contributes to the realization of the above threshold where you are surrounded by glass and the views totally out into the landscape render you free from any boundaries, the heaviness of the mass above serves as a realization of the edge between your experienced freedom and the load overhead. Even more so contributing to the notion of the above threshold, the central room operates, in addition as an office function, as a transition space to each floor as it moves vertically from floor to floor to floor.

And Before Us

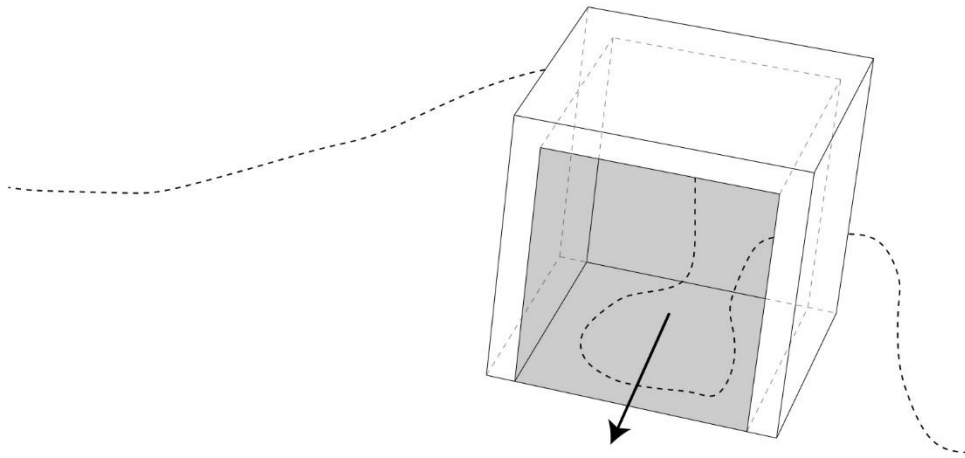


Figure 2.34, Before Us.

The threshold before us is defined by the boundary of that we can see ahead of us and that which we know is behind us. The threshold that is “before us” is measured through the distance of edges which we perceive from where we stand, relying on the approximation we assume between where we are and what is over there. This threshold exists at that edge between what is before us out in the background and what is before us in the immediate foreground.

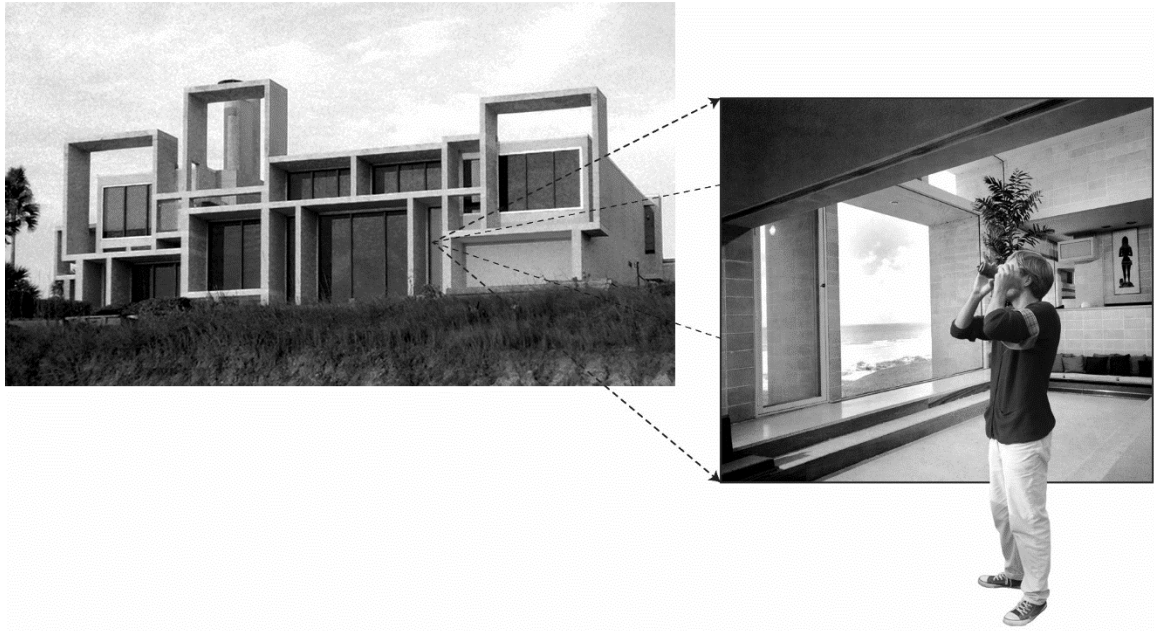


Figure 2.35, Milam Residence (Jackson, Florida 1961).

Paul Rudolph's Milam Residence (1961) is as distinguishable from up close as it is from far away, and then from even further away. The front façade (the "back" of the house) is made of a series of deep, framed openings acting dualistically as sun screens and as view portals. The depth to which these frames extend contribute to their success in omitting the harshness of the Florida sun. The view portals, which could have existed without the frames, are uniquely transformed with Rudolph's unusual over-extension of them, triggering the view portals to reach beyond themselves and stretch across the landscape into the elsewhere. This stretching notion, achieved through the depth of the frame, realizes the threshold before us.

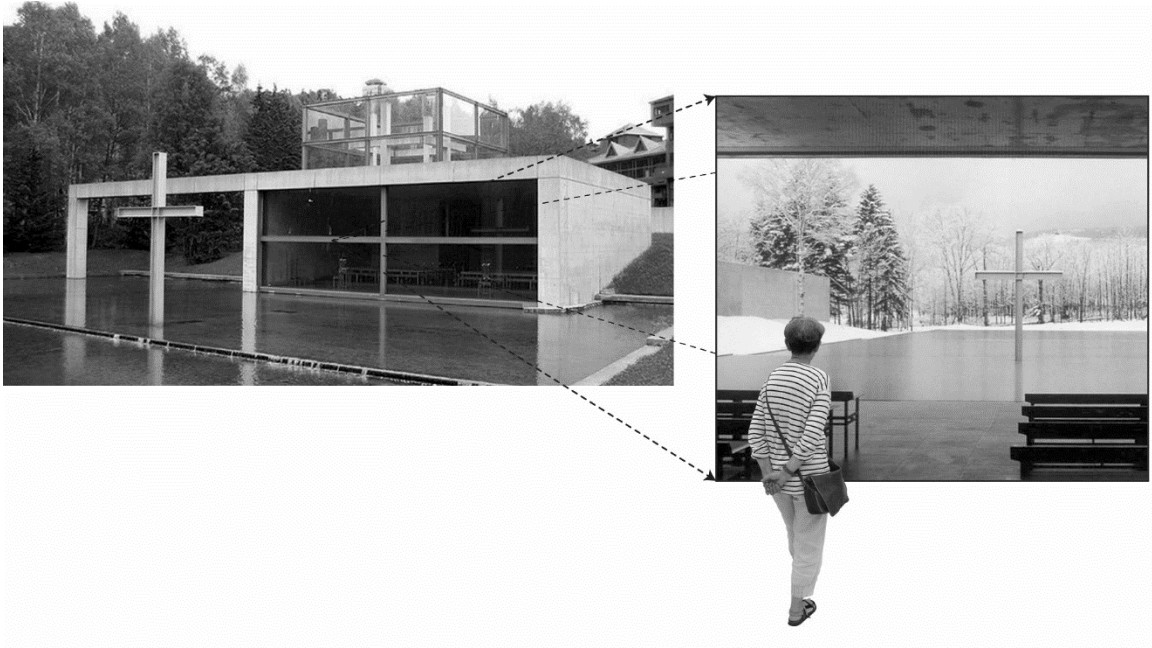


Figure 2.36, Church on the Water (Near Tomamu, Japan 1988).

Tadao Ando is well celebrated for his work Church on the Water (1988). The Church's central space epitomizes the threshold before us as it opens completely into the nature careful to merge and create the edge between the outside and the inside. Church on the Water's central space is set into the landscape, sloping down before the water. The design on the space articulates a frame effect (similar to Rudolph's frames) extending back into the slope. It seems that the frame is pulled so far back into the slope and so far into the water that the room feels as if it were an extension into the landscape, pronouncing the threshold before us. Within Ando's space, at the water's edge, the threshold before us pauses us, silences us, as we gaze into it.

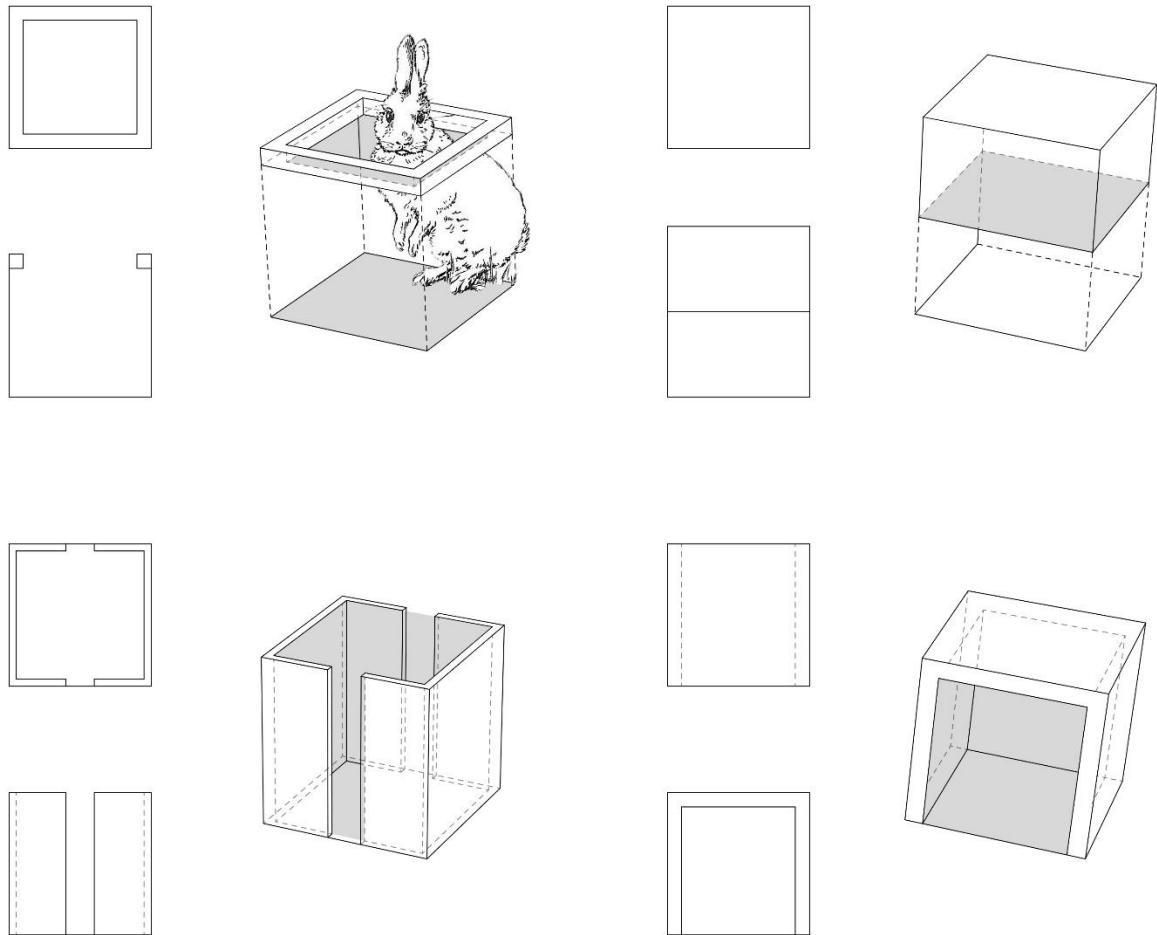


Figure 2.37, Diagram of “Around Us” Architecture Thresholds.

The common denominator in the thresholds, which are below us, beside us, above us, and below us, is the experience of crossing the in-between. This experience of crossing the in-between is the awareness of the thresholds around us. Within this awareness, we unconsciously and consciously determine the boundaries of the spaces we identify; that the edge of something exists where that something becomes something else.

There is, thus, an invisible dialogue between our surroundings and us. The awareness of the threshold is through our perception of where we are standing and where we are not standing. Plato illustrates otherness as the conclusion that each object is what it is, and is not what it is not. We accept this otherness with the understanding that the difference between what it is and what it is not is a result of the absence of sameness amongst the two objects.

We live in a world teeming with distinct things, all of them others to our perspective—as if they are objects because they object to our viewing them just as those things over there, since each of them put up a different “here”. The perceived separateness between objects draws itself as the liminality between their edges: where they sit here/there.

“Only man, as opposed to nature, has the faculty to binding and unbinding, and in this specific manner: that one is always the presupposition of the other. By disengaging two things from the undisturbed state of nature, in order to designate them ‘separate,’ we have already related them to each other in our awareness. We have differentiated them both, together, from everything that lies between them.”⁴

Camus tells us that it is our human condition to search for meaning⁵, which, I imagine, is what Georg Simmel rephrases in his idea that man is the only being which, “as opposed to nature, has the faculty to binding and unbinding...”⁶ This act of separating is the product of the search for order and definition as we define objects through what they are not (otherness) so we may make sense of them. The separation, as the reason, forms the two, distinct objects and the threshold, as the unreasonable, binds those two objects—making the objects both the same thing and nothing.

Here meets there at the threshold: the in between where you are at the same time here and there, and nowhere. This is the absurdity.

⁴ Georg Simmel, “Bridge and Door.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 11, no. 1 (1994): 5.

⁵ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

⁶ Georg Simmel, “Bridge and Door”, 5.

06. The Screened Patio: Threshold Typologies

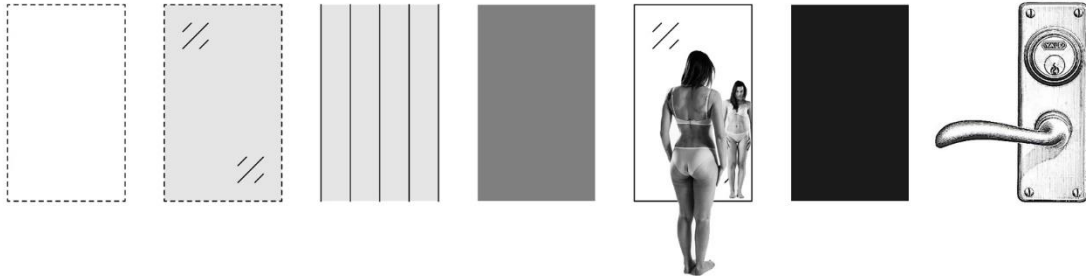


Figure 2.38, Void to Solid.

Diagrammatic Analysis

In an effort to more clearly understand the threshold, the absurdity within architecture, the following is a typology study of the thresholds we encounter in our daily routines categorized by Camus' four absurd characters: the seducer, the actor, the artist, and the rebel.

The following analysis and note study diagram these thresholds as forms of “doorways” (directional threshold of the apparent separation between spaces): going from seducer typologies to rebel typologies—going from the fluid, easily crossed thresholds to closed, obstructing thresholds.

“And the human being is likewise the bordering creature who has no border.”¹

¹ Georg Simmel, "Bridge and Door" *Theory, Culture & Society* 11, no. 1 (1994): 10.

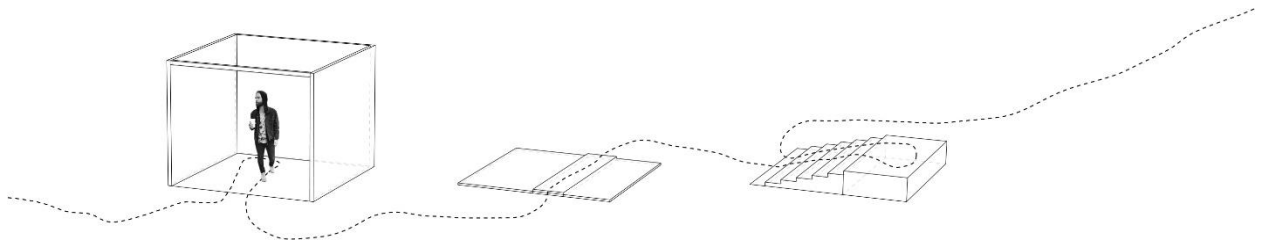


Figure 2.39, Seducer Typologies.

Seducer Typologies

Absurd Character Contradiction:	several loves, non-committal, in-between loves
Seducer: Threshold which Binds:	effortless in and out
Transparent:	open walls/roofs
	side-walk
	opening into stairway

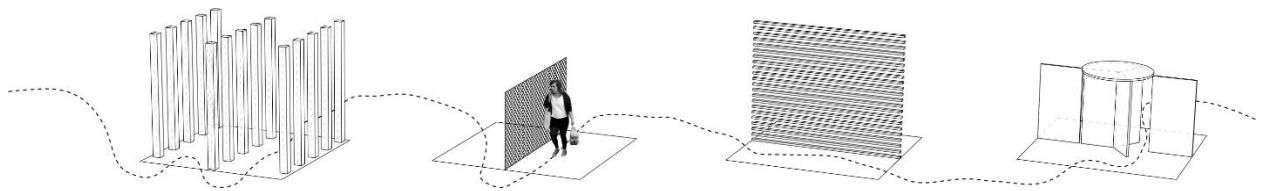


Figure 2.40, Actor Typologies.

Actor Typologies

Absurd Character Contradiction:	several lives, fleeting fame, in-between characters
Actor: Threshold which Pretends:	illusion of barrier
Semi-Transparent:	row of columns chain-link fence louvered windows rotating door

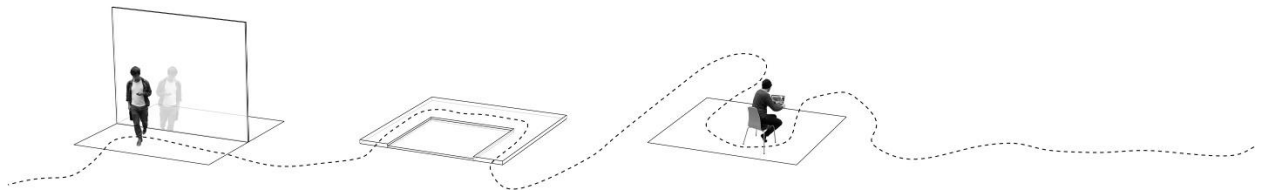


Figure 2.41 Artist Typologies.

Artist Typologies

Absurd Character Contradiction:	describes, does not hope to explain, in-between worlds
Artist: Threshold which Mimics:	reflection of surroundings
Mirrored:	reflective façade
	reflective pool
	retina screen

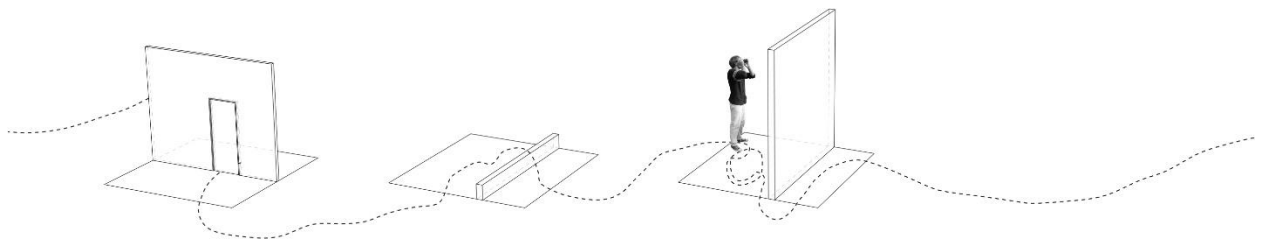


Figure 2.42, Rebel Typologies.

Rebel Typologies

Absurd Character Contradiction:	ceaseless state of revolt, in-between revolts
Rebel: Threshold which Opposes:	solidity requiring force
Opaque:	door to push
	shortened wall to step over
	heightened wall to climb over

Stage Three:

The Bar

The Renovated Lounge

The Kitchen

The Elevator

01. The Bar: The Absurd & Architecture

If we ask a building what is its meaning, it will respond through its given function. A building's meaning and function are synonymous; it is meaningful if it functional. We understand that a house's meaning is its function as a house—where we may walk through our front door to find our living room, kitchen, and bedrooms. Consider too a building which stands as symbolic, demonstrating an implied meaning, also has meaning through its purpose to symbolize.

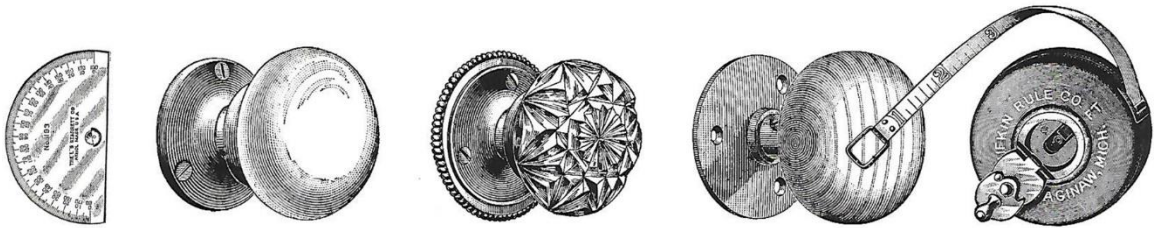


Figure 3.10, Doorknobs: function and separation.

If a house does not function as a house, it then becomes an irrational house: an absurd house in the “that’s absurd!”¹ sense that it is only illogical, ridiculous, and foolish. This irrational house removes itself from the expected meaningfulness of a ‘house’. It is functionless, so it is meaningless. Rejecting its function and meaning, the irrational house commits a “suicide”², choosing to be nothing. The irrational house then is not a product of the absurd according to the philosophy of Absurdism³, but is instead a dead architecture—a dead house which has chosen non-existence over persistence. The dead house will surely be abandoned, vandalized, boarded up, condemned, and eventually demolished to make way for a new house.

¹ Reference to chapter two of part one: In Passing: “That’s Absurd!”

² Reference to Camus’ “suicide”: a response to the absurd which he rejects in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

³ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

Camus rejects suicide as an appropriate response to the absurd and advocates for the persistence to exist within the contradictions of the absurdity.⁴ The house might reject it's meaning but choose instead (of suicide) to exist as a rebellion—be tipped onto its side, like Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, be sliced in half, like Gordon Matta-Clark's *Splitting*, or solidified in concrete, like Rachel Whiteread's *House*. Sitting as any transformation which eliminates its function, the house is on display amongst the neighboring houses as a jester amongst the other characters upon the stage. If the house is tipped onto its side, for example, it rejects its intended use and too rejects its identity as architecture. The house tipped over, sliced in half, or solidified in concrete no longer has meaning as architecture, but newly as art. In this rebellion against its meaning, as the house sits tipped over, the purpose of the house is still removed so the function is still removed; but here, instead of dying, a new purpose is gained as a house-sculpture. The house-sculpture exhibits a revolt against the absurdity of seeking order where none exists as a physical contradiction sitting before us; and so the once house becomes absurdism as art—it is not absurdism as architecture.

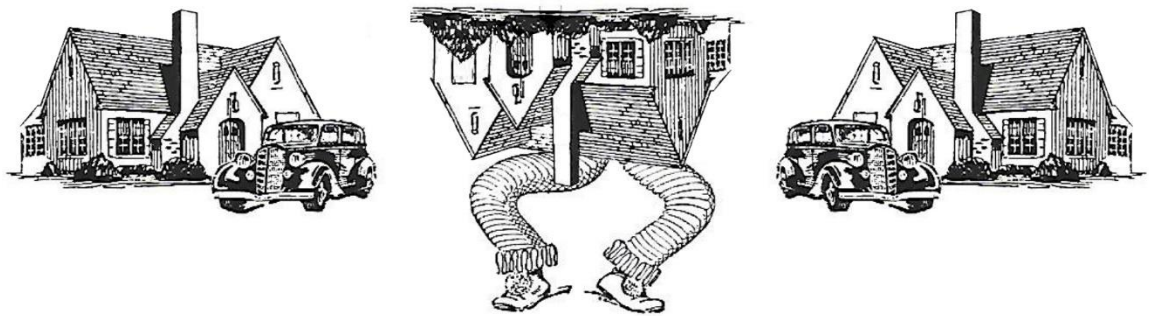


Figure 3.11, Jester-House.

The dead house and the house-sculpture cannot be absurdism as architecture because all architecture must have function. Nothing dead nor sculptural performs architectural function.

⁴ Ibid.

Absurdism as architecture must then have function if we cannot remove function without also removing the house from architecture.

Architecture and function are then not two independent concepts, but instead a distinction between two entwined facets of the same concept. The two are further entwined as architecture strives for the most functional relationship between it and its functions. The functionality of the functions is designed by the floor plan, which separates each function and decides their placement within the building. For example, a basic house generally has a living area, kitchen/dining, and bedrooms, each having their own functions, which are then taken and placed in the most functional manner, resulting in the floor plan.

The floor plan designates the separation of the functions, creating the separation of rooms and too, in a larger scale, the separation of buildings. Thus, there are several different, separated types of rooms and buildings meaningful through their (separated) functions—bedrooms, classrooms, laboratories, etc. and therefore houses, schools, hospitals, and infinitely so forth. Out of our human condition to search for order and reason, we separate the functions so we may make sense of them. We do this with the reasoning that a certain space performs a certain function since it is separated from another space which performs a different function.

If we were to remove the separation between functions (the floor plan), the house would, like the dead-house, commit “suicide” and become dysfunctional and meaningless all the same. A dead-house or house-sculpture does not architecturally portray the contradiction of absurdism as they each forfeited their functions all together, eliminating their architecture. If absurdism is to exist as an architecture, it must at the same time reject its meaning and retain its meaning.

03. The Renovated Lounge: Making Against Meaning



Figure 3.12, Making Against Meaning.

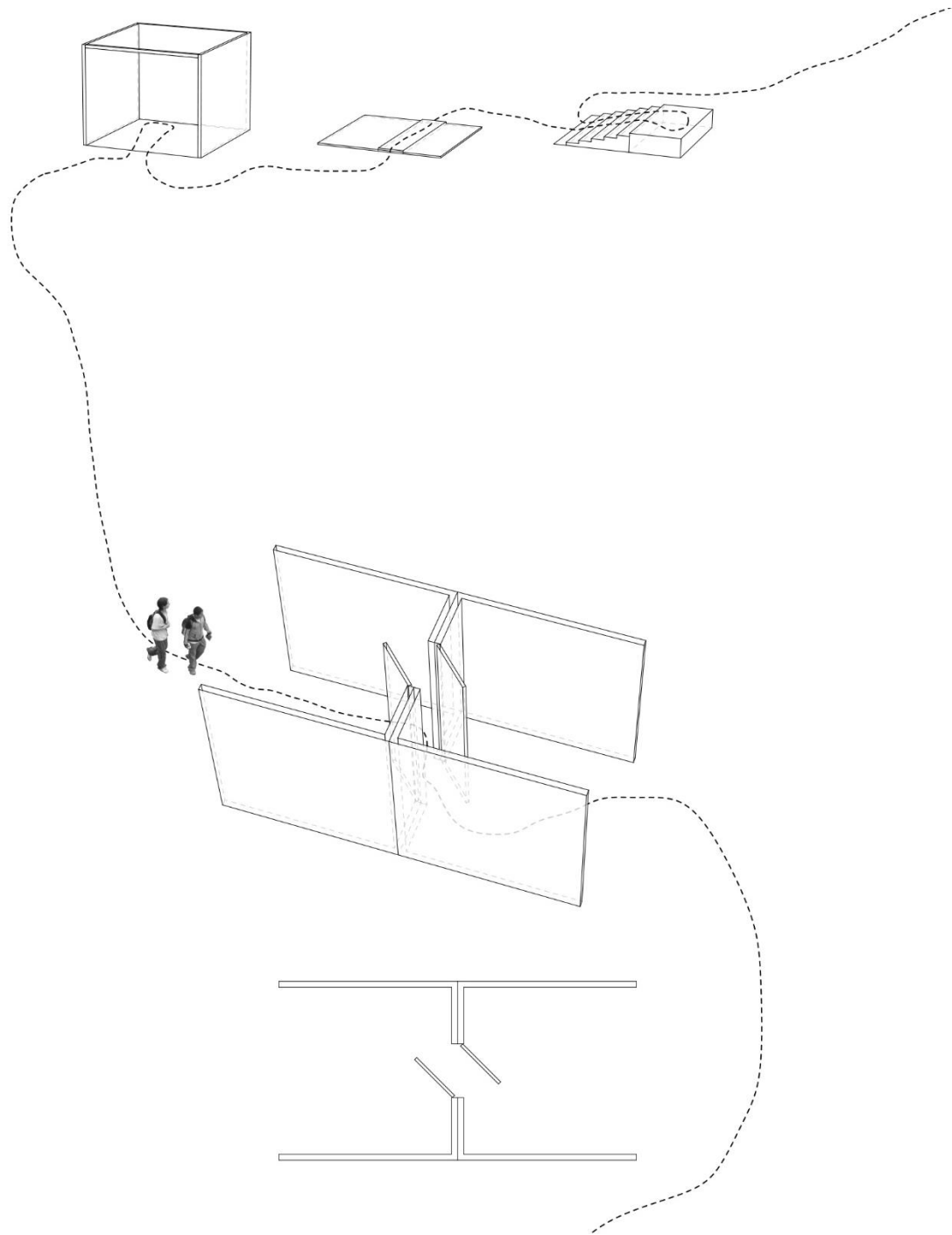


Figure 3.13, Inside-Outside, Door and Door, 1 of 4.

Door and Door Threshold Exploration: From the seducer typology thresholds (those which bind), the following design progression considers the doorway in an exploration of the experience of the in-between the inside and outside. By mirroring the doors, the notion of entering and exiting is broken into two. The solid and void play then emphasizes the inside and outside in the absurd manner of the seducer who commits only to non-commitment. This is represented with the idea that of a room is uninhabitable only as you enter and exit.

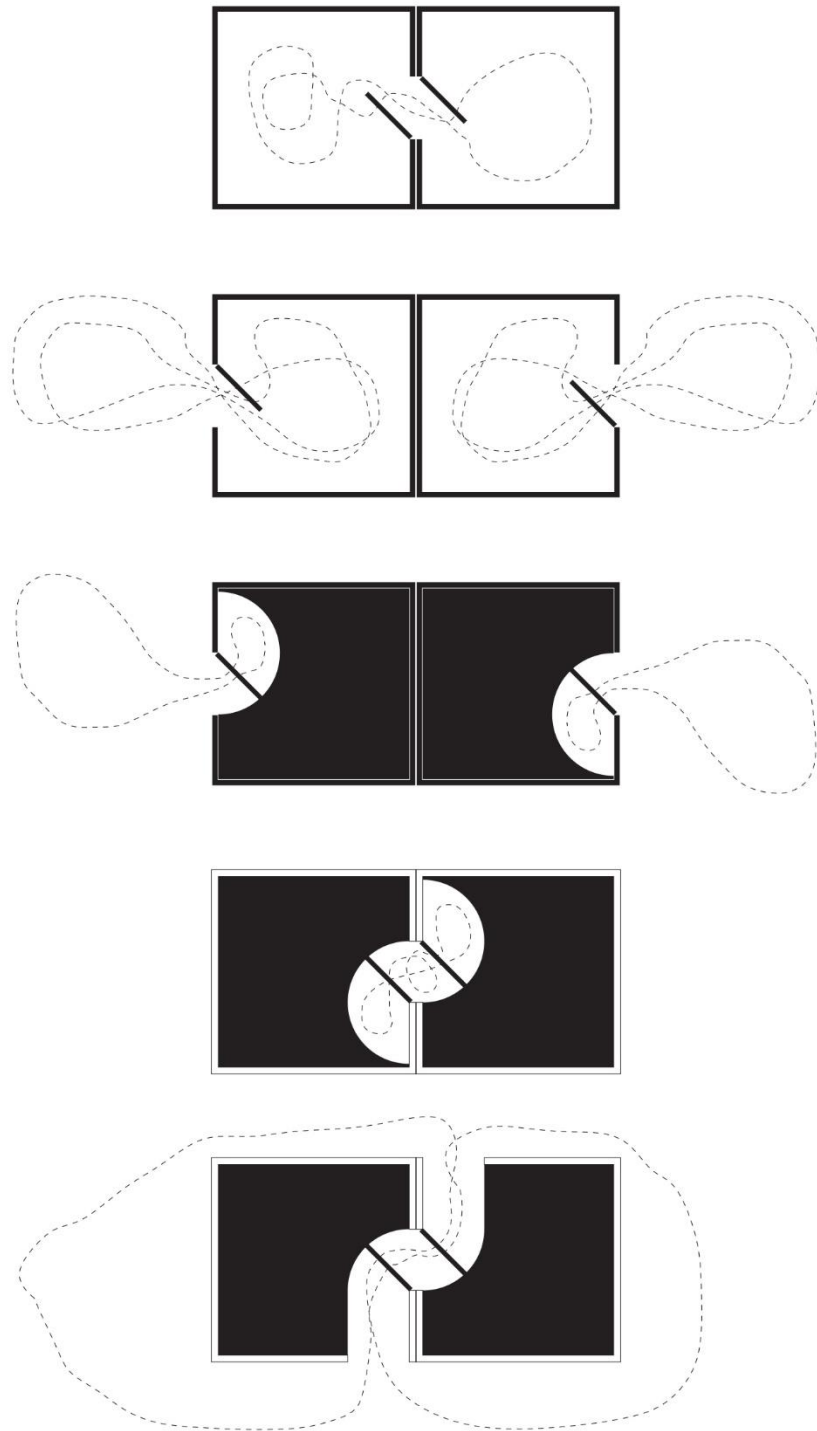


Figure 3.14, Inside-Outside, Door and Door, 2 of 4.

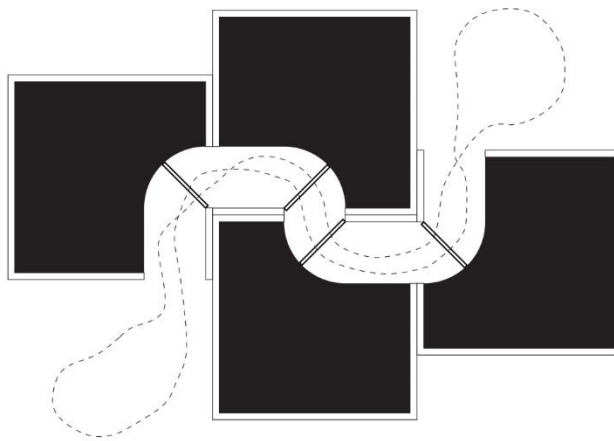


Figure 3.15, Inside-Outside, Door and Door, 3 of 4.

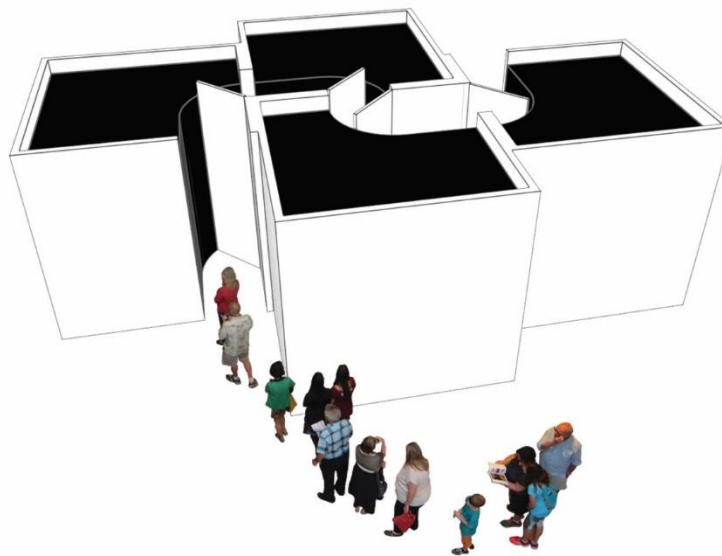
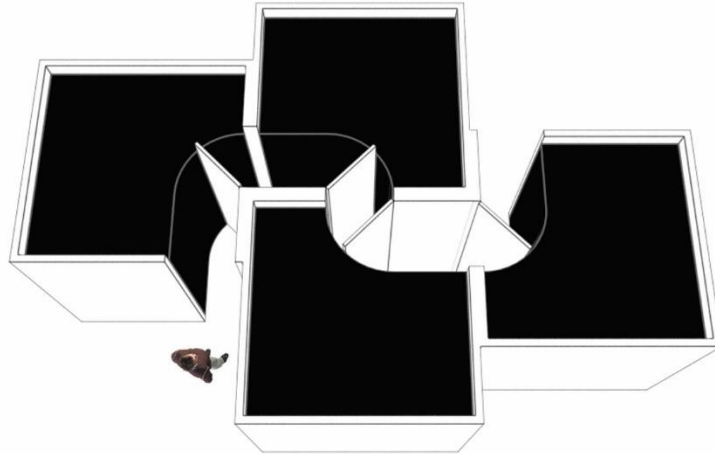


Figure 3.16, Inside-Outside, Door and Door, 4 of 4.

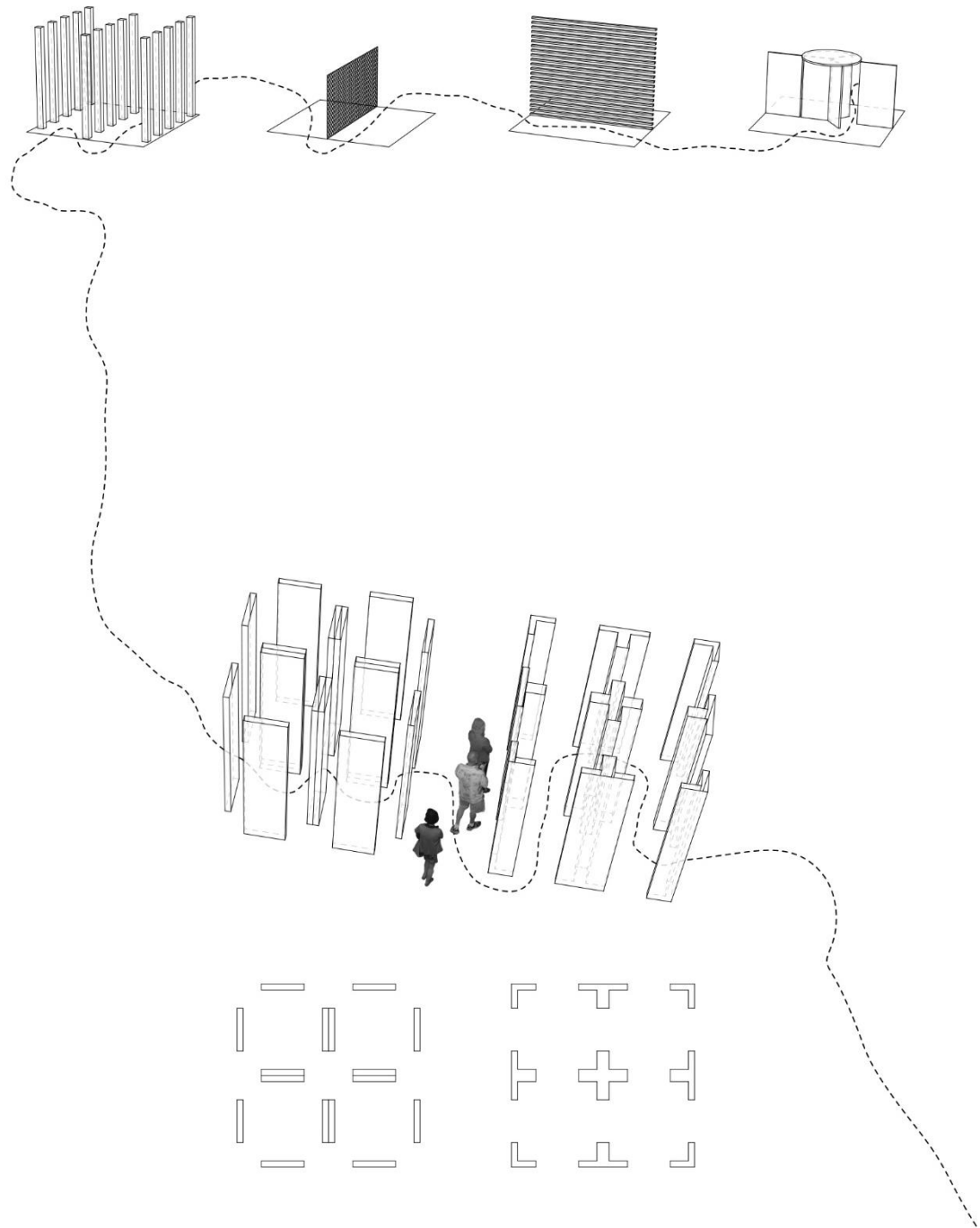


Figure 3.17, Inside-Outside, Corners and Edges, 1 of 6.

Corners and Edges Threshold Exploration: From the actor typology thresholds (illusion of barrier), the following design progression considers the corners and edges of a room in an exploration of the experience of the in-between the inside and outside. In the first series, the room is split into four and stripped of all corners, leaving only the walls. The second series performs the opposite as after it is split into four, all the walls are removed, leaving only the corners. The boundaries of entering and existing is blurred through the reversal of corners and edges. The architecture standing represents the absurd manner of the actor's life which is comprised of many partial lives.

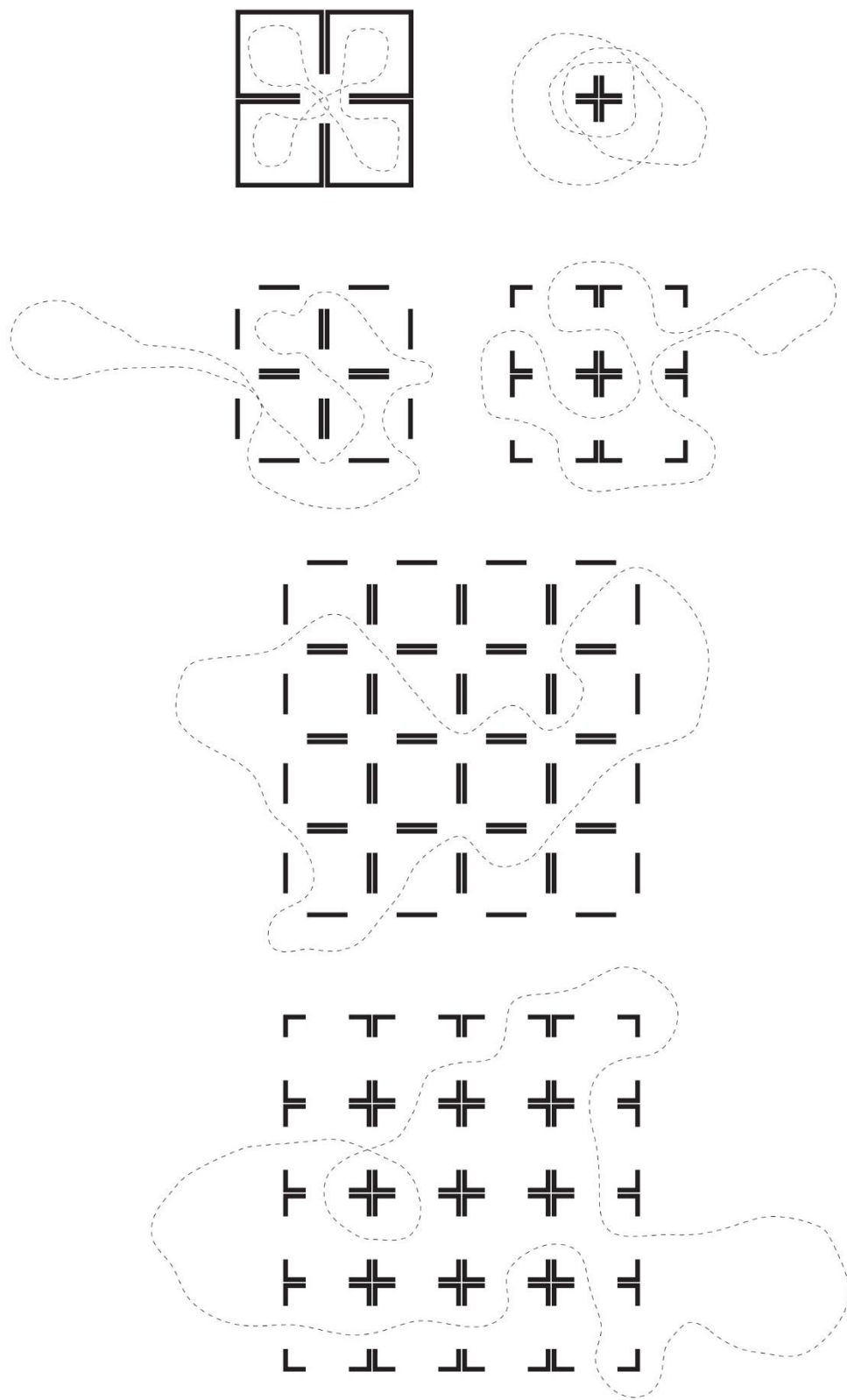


Figure 3.18, Inside-Outside, Corners and Edges, 2 of 6.

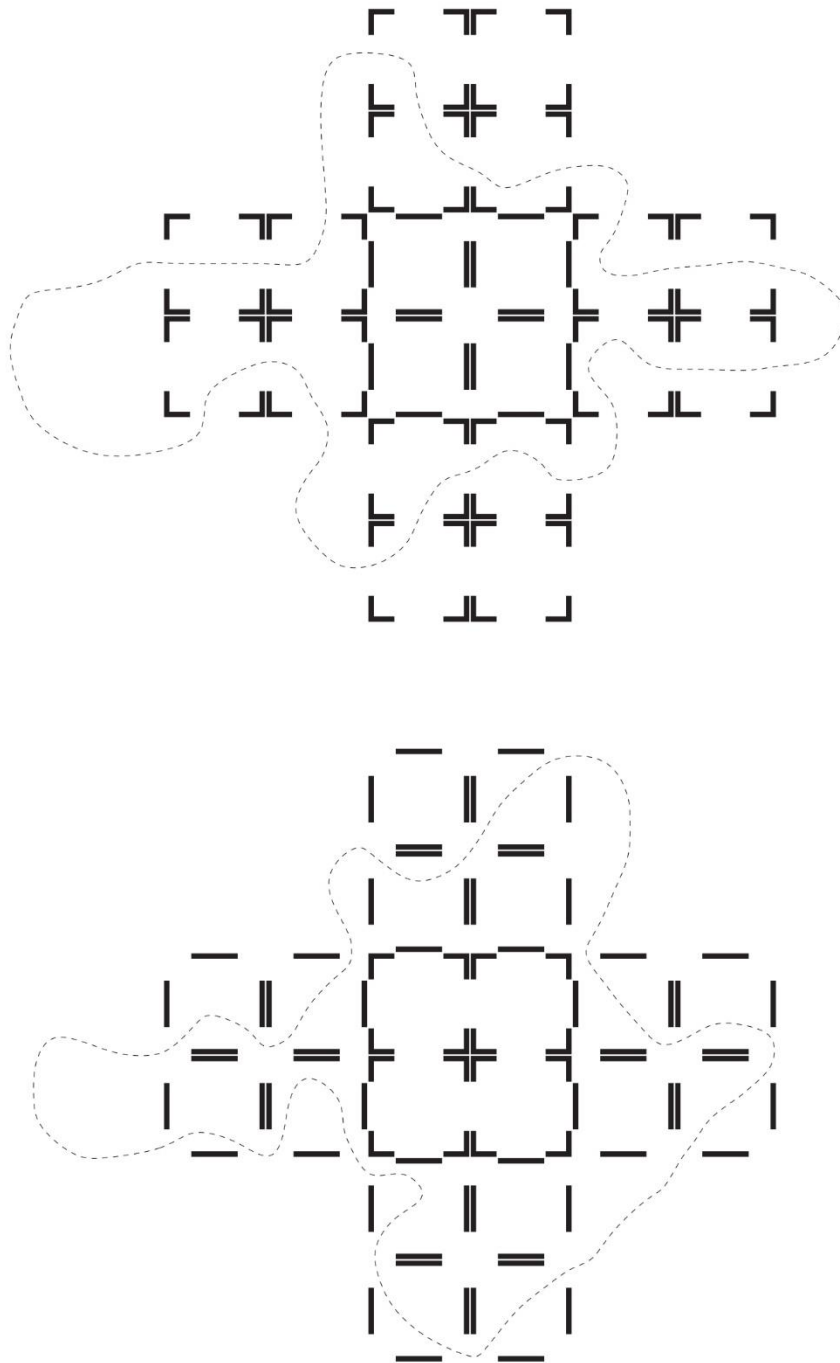


Figure 3.19, Inside-Outside, Corners and Edges, 3 of 6.

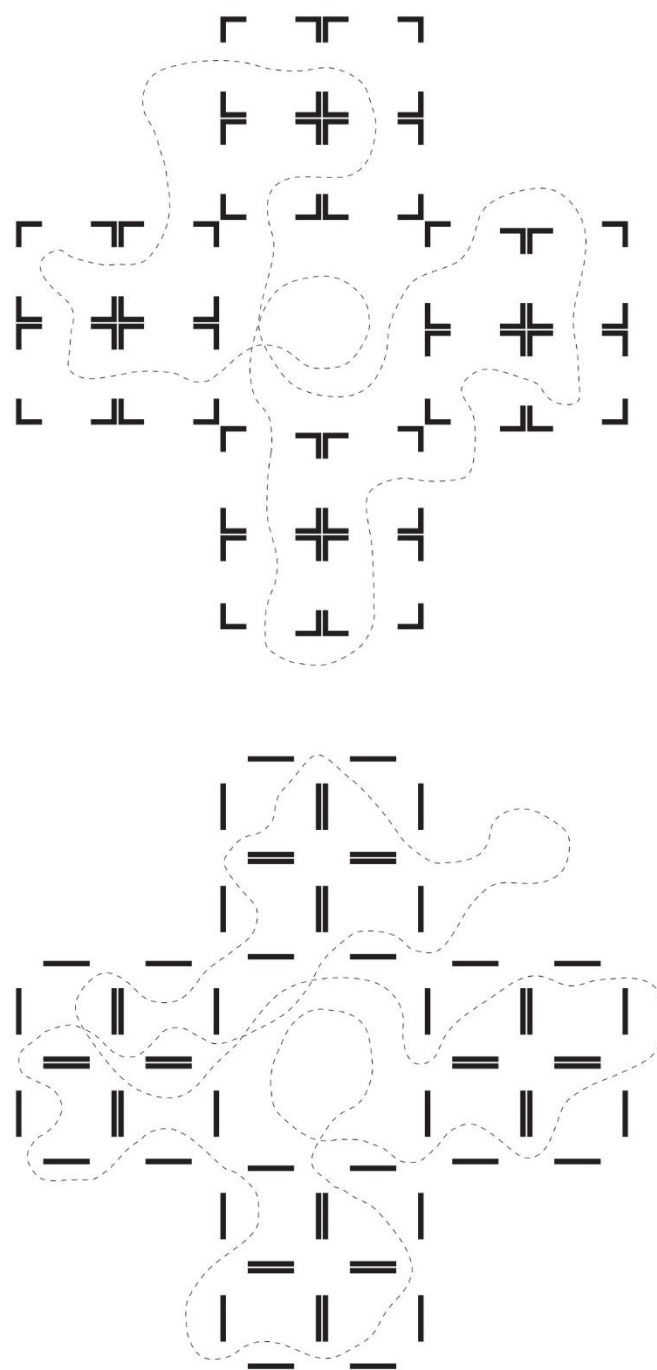


Figure 3.20, Inside-Outside, Corners and Edges, 4 of 6.

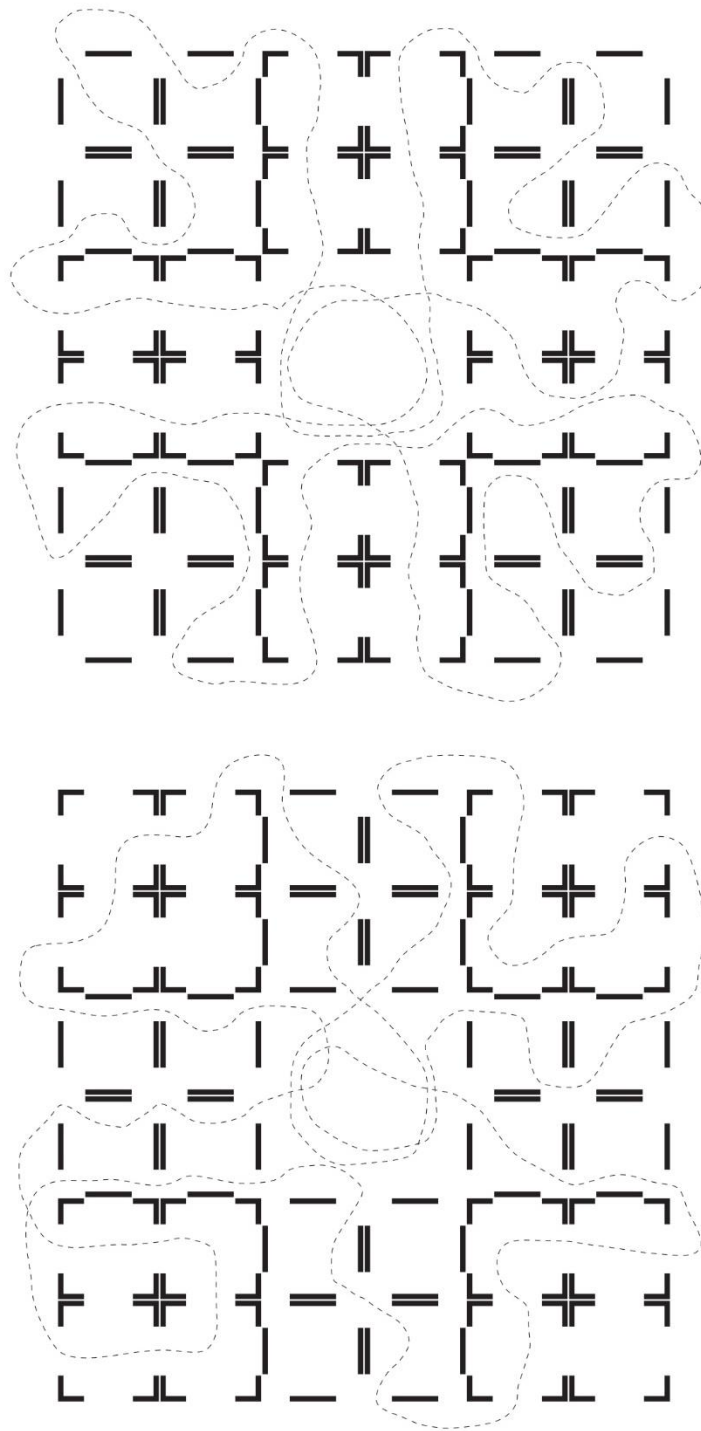


Figure 3.21, Inside-Outside, Corners and Edges, 5 of 6.

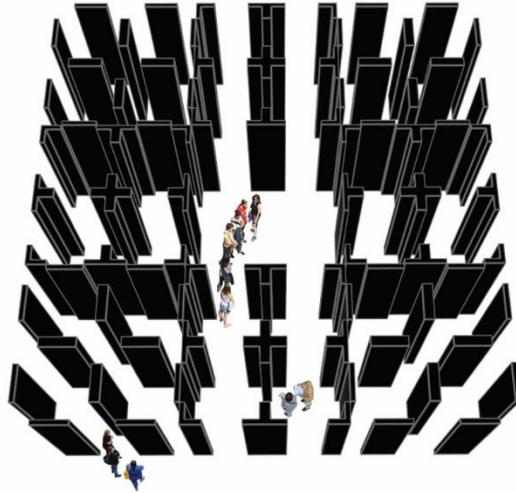


Figure 3.22, Inside-Outside, Corners and Edges, 6 of 6.

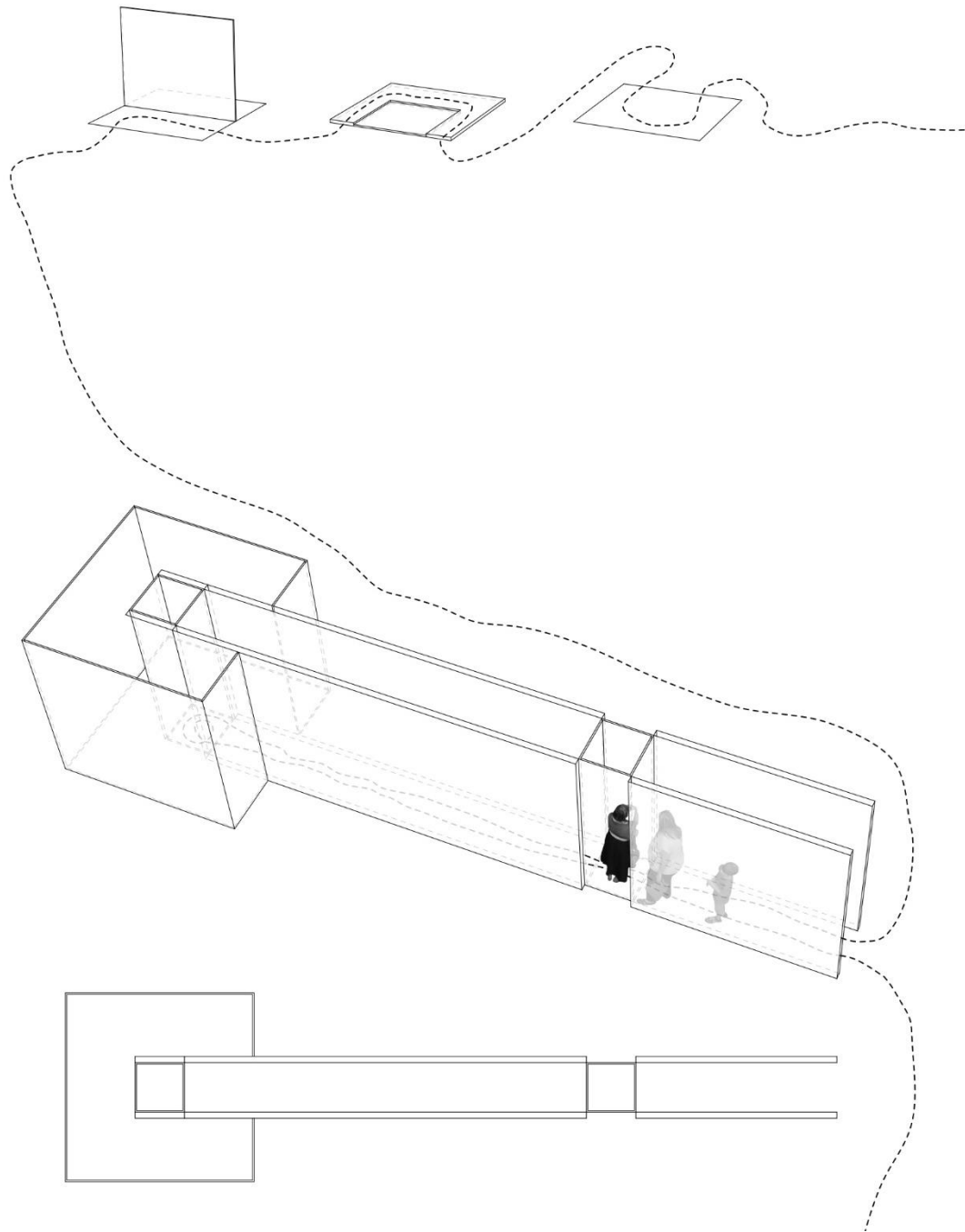


Figure 3.23, Inside-Outside, Solid and Void, 1 of 4.

Solid and Void Threshold Exploration: From the artist typology thresholds (mimicry), the following design progression considers the solid and void in an exploration of the experience of the in-between the inside and outside. The solid and void concept translates into the idea of two opposite materials which act together to distinguish the inside and outside (solid and void) as reflections of each other. The solid pathway which is broken momentarily by a void, leads into a space which through experimentation, alternates between solid and void. This space is consistent on both ends, mimicking each other to create spaces which appear to be “ends” of the pathway. This composition in-between opposing materials channels the absurdity of the artist who is forever in-between worlds with an aim not to explain, but to only describe in mimicry.

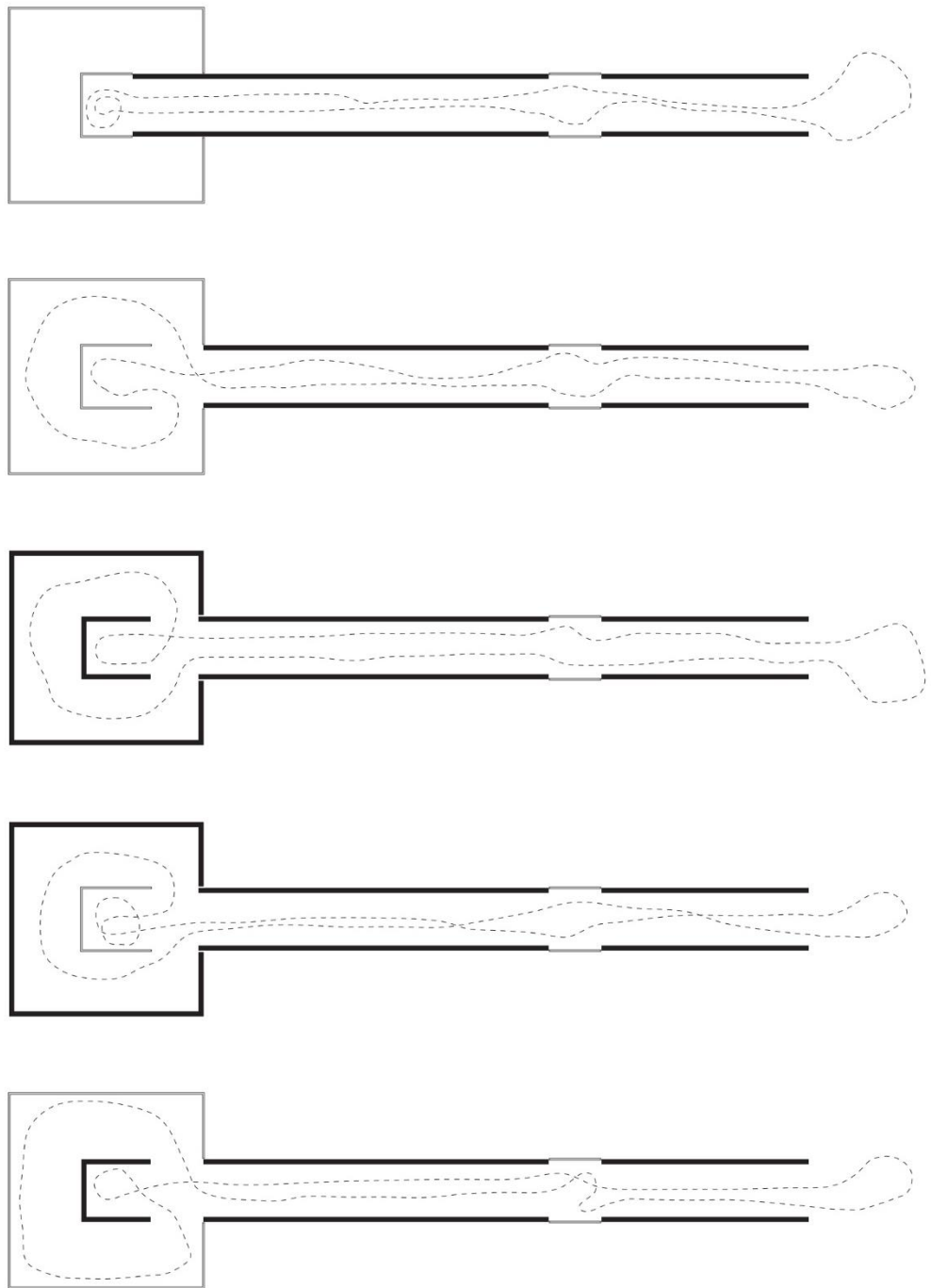


Figure 3.24, Inside-Outside, Solid and Void, 2 of 4.

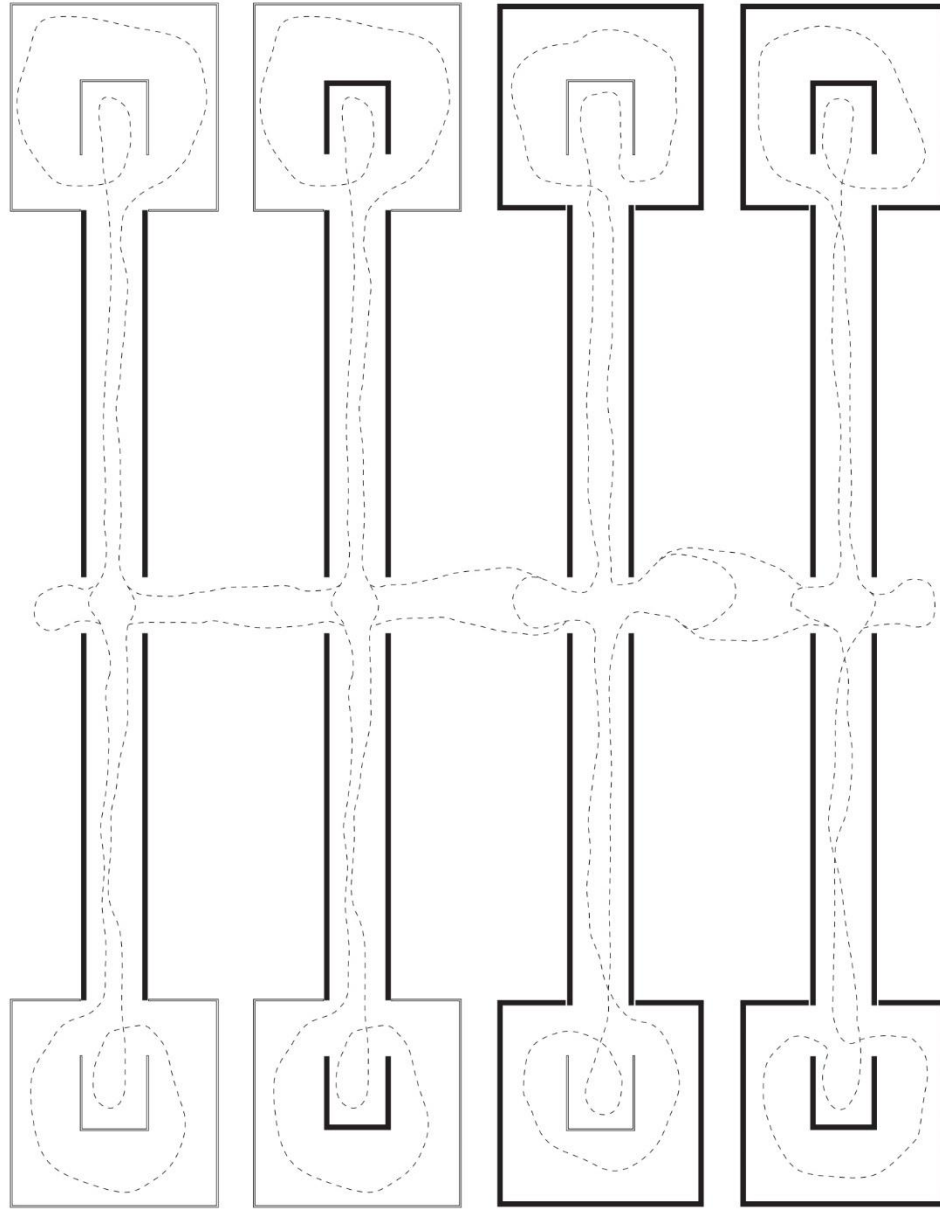


Figure 3.25, Inside-Outside, Solid and Void, 3 of 4.

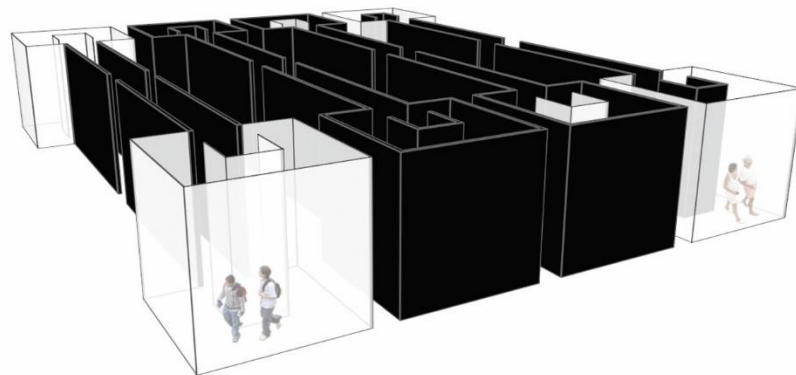
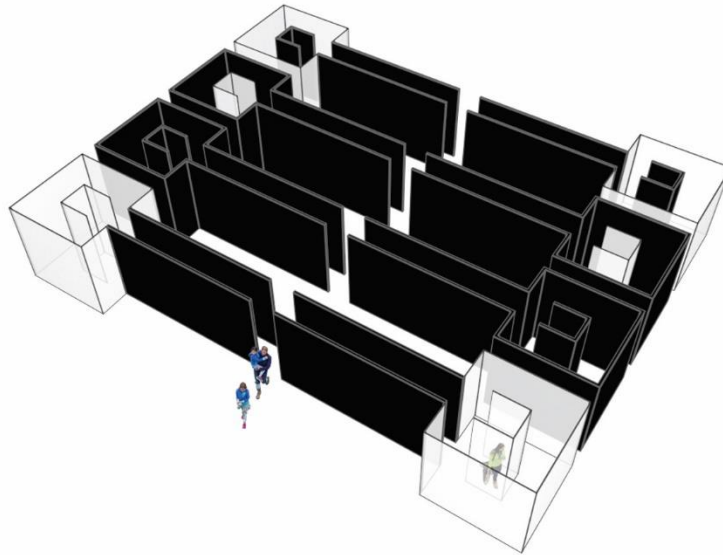


Figure 3.26, Inside-Outside, Solid and Void, 4 of 4.

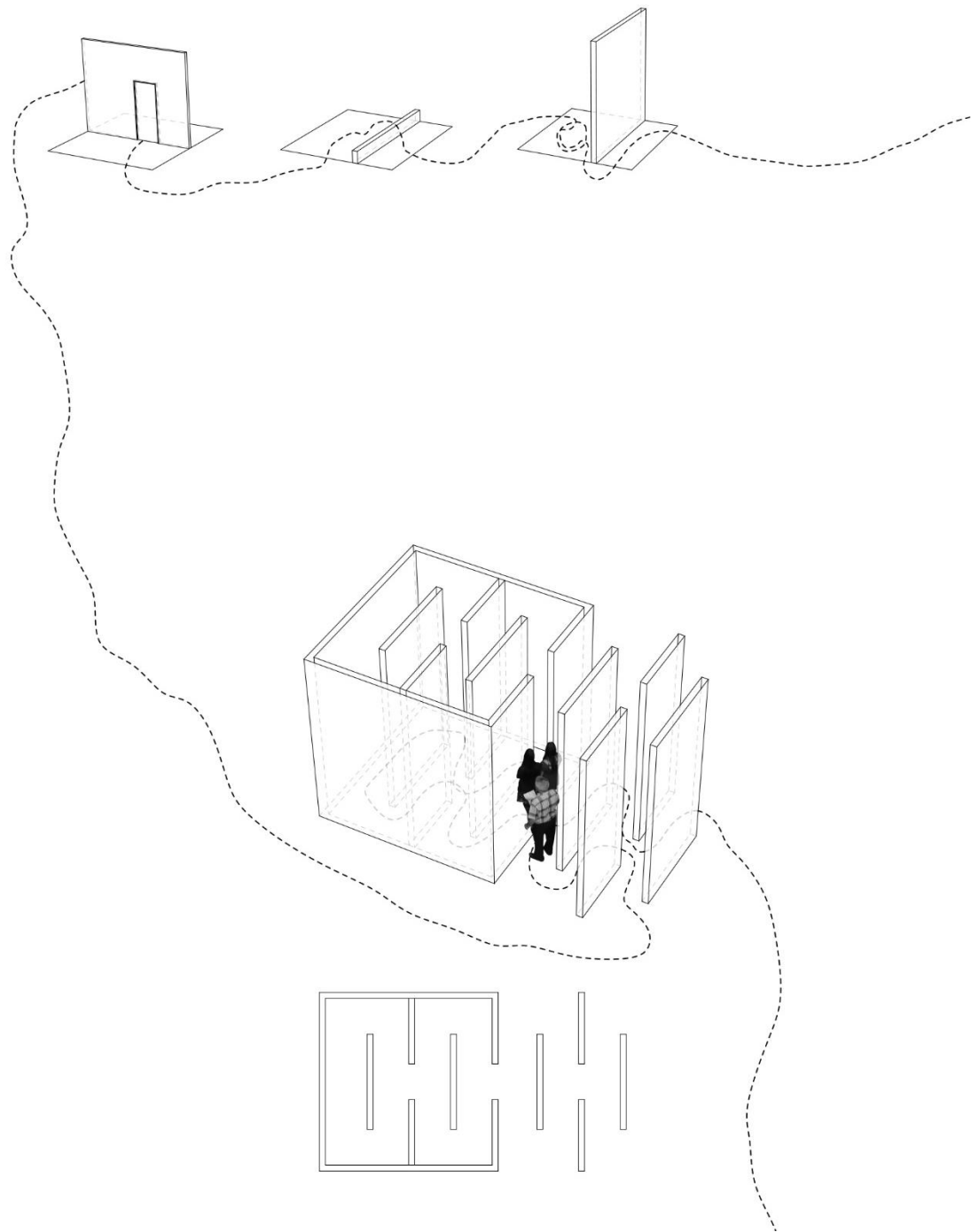


Figure 3.27, Inside-Outside, Wall and Wall, 1 of 4.

Wall and Wall Threshold Exploration: From the rebel typology thresholds (opposition), the following design progression considers the repeated wall in an exploration of the experience of the in-between the inside and outside. By staggering the wall, the front elevation suggests solidity where there is no entrance. Upon closer examination of the wall, it is apparent that you may enter and exit between them. The series of juxtaposed walls flows into a room, which entertains the arrangement of the inside and outside. The absurd rebel is in a creaseless state of revolt, which directs the design's transformation from outside to inside to outside and inside and so forth as a translation of his existence in-between revolts and the thresholds existence in-between in and out.

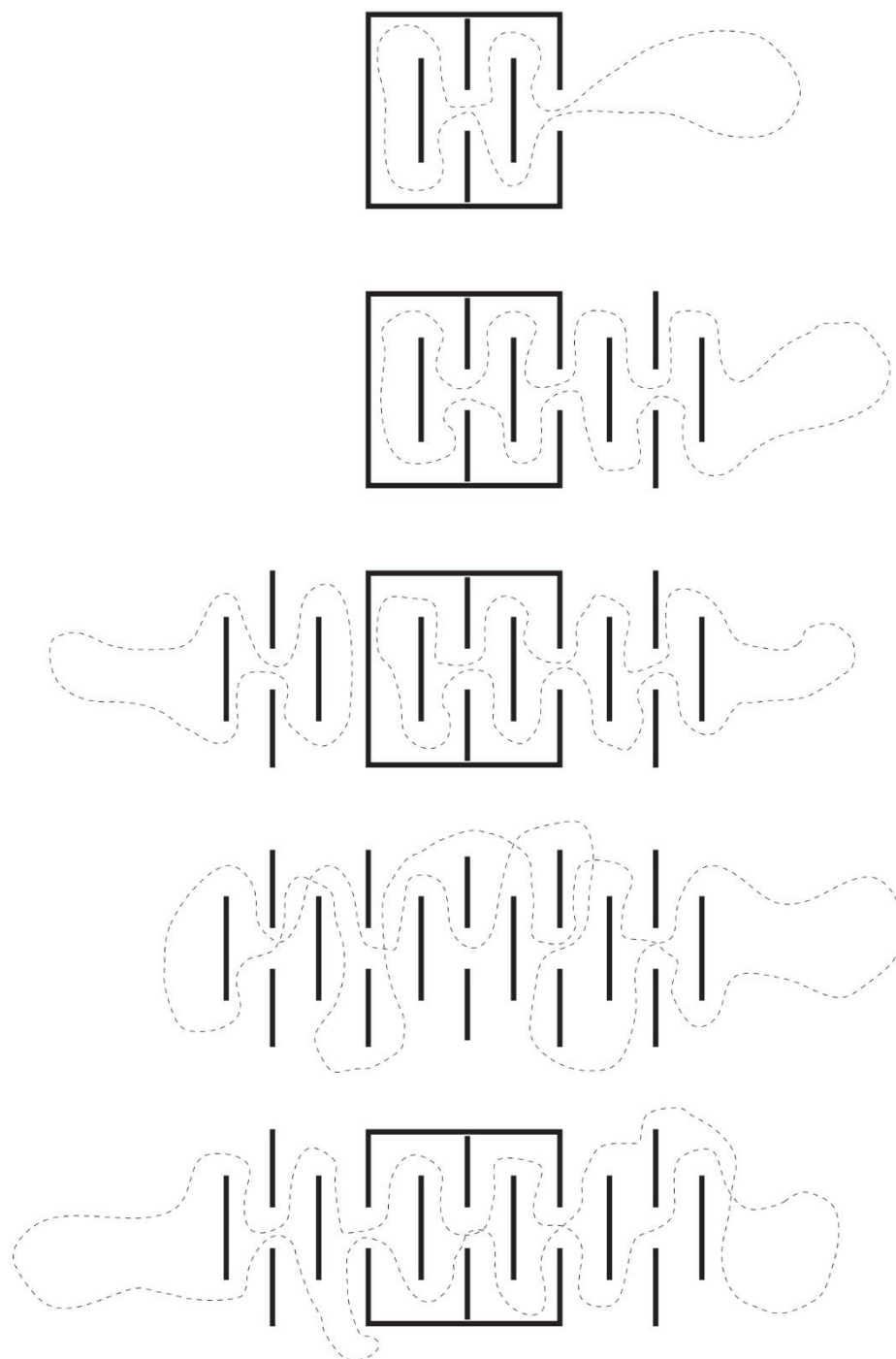


Figure 3.28, Inside-Outside, Wall and Wall, 2 of 4.

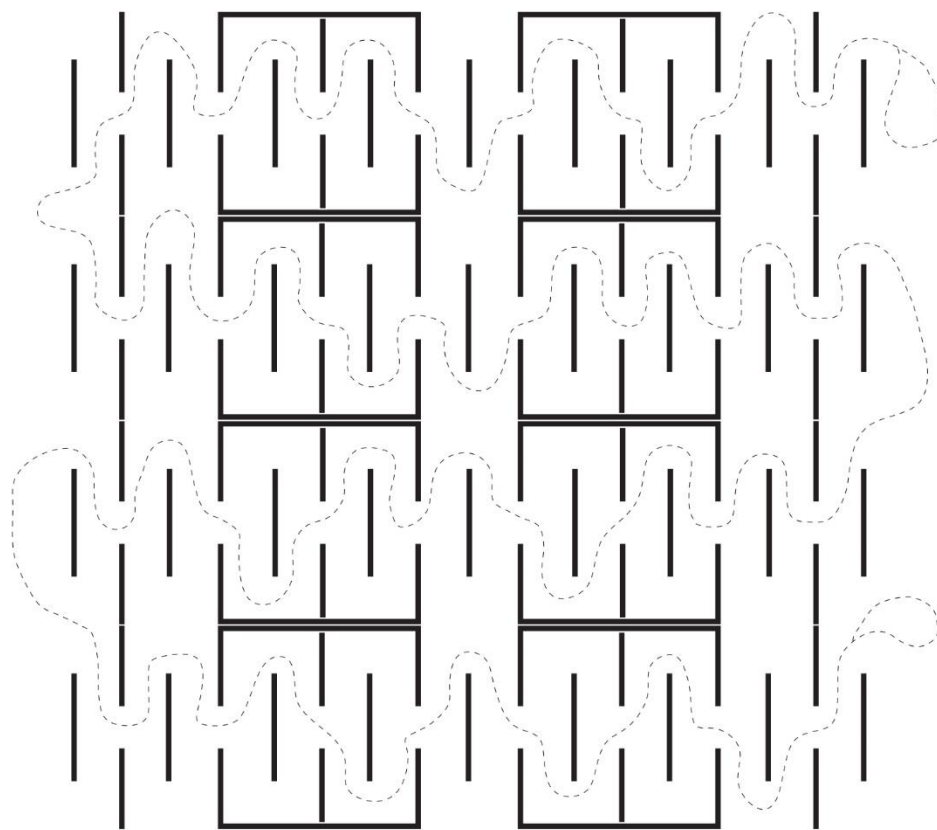


Figure 3.29, Inside-Outside, Wall and Wall, 3 of 4.

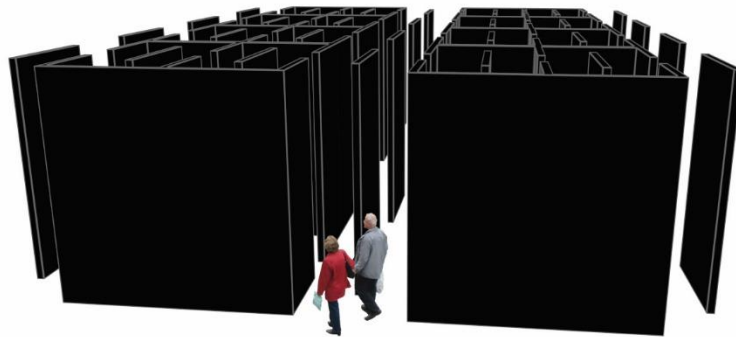
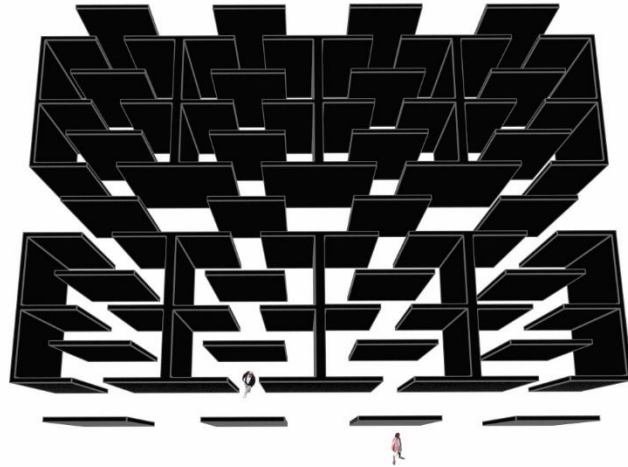


Figure 3.30, Inside-Outside, Wall and Wall, 4 of 4.

03. The Kitchen: “Eat Me” and “Drink Me” Scales



Figure 3.31, Alice and the Door 3 of 3.

The nature of the threshold is independent of scale. Its dimensions vary indefinitely since the threshold is subject to that which it exists between. The threshold is absurd in that it is the intersection where the inside and outside are simultaneous, which occurs indifferent to scale. Scale, though irrelevant to the threshold, is very revenant to the absurdity of the threshold.

Take Alice’s experience in wonderland, where, after she falls down the rabbit hole, finds herself in a dead end room with a locked door far too small to fit through. She experiments with scale by ingesting various confections which cause her to shrink very small and grow incredibly large.

The size of the doorway determines an additional contradiction in relation to Alice. Taking the doorway as the most basic threshold:



Figure 3.32, Alice and the Door 1 of 3.

A doorway which is too small to use becomes a contradiction of architecture scale. The shrunken door is an absurdity demonstrating the contradiction of it being a door and not a door at the same time.

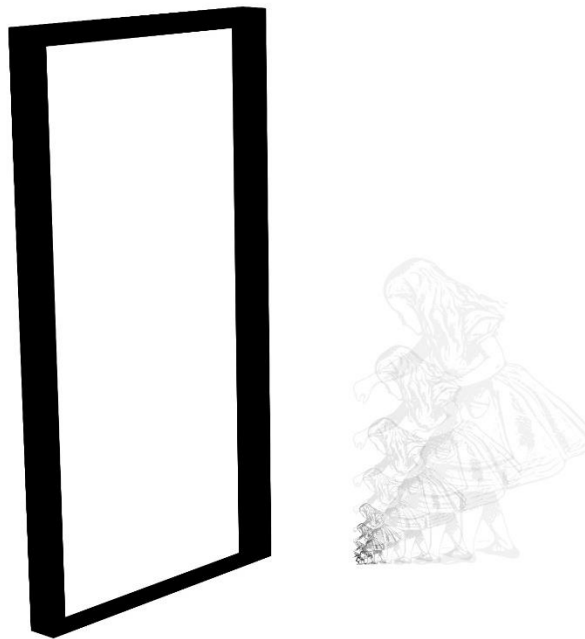


Figure 3.33, Alice and the Door 2 of 3.

On the other hand, a threshold which is oversized becomes a contradiction of architecture scale too; but, in that it is so large that the threshold is transformed into a space. This space then forms

resultant thresholds at each edge of the enlarged doorway. Now, in order to cross through, you must enter through one threshold which brings you into the doorway space and then exit through the other threshold to arrive at other side of the doorway.

The scale of the threshold may supplement different types of contradictions to the doorway and therefore add to the overall absurdity of the threshold.

04. The Elevator: The Conclusion

The jester, as a contradiction to society, acts entirely against societal norms as he juggles and trips around the seriousness of the other characters. His unassimilated behavior provides a comic relief—yet that which makes us laugh is a profound criticism of the very societal forces which make the jester a fool. Only a jester juxtaposed against society is absurd. A jester alone, suddenly devoid of social order or exclusively amongst fellow jesters, is no longer absurd because he is no longer a contradiction. The jester's contradictory nature as a contrast amidst society is the absurdity of his character.

The clearest articulation of the absurd is the contradiction: the coupling of incompatibilities perceived as illogical. The idea of a square which is a circle and a circle which is a square is a contradiction. These shapes are absurd.

Such are the limits of the contradictions we find in architecture. Take for example the architectural contradiction of the inside and the outside. Venturi writes, in his *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, that Architecture wrongfully succumbs to the limits of rationalizing its complexities and contradiction through the omission of them (laughing at the jester). Venturi advocates in opposition and instead promotes methods of embracing architecture's inherent complexities and contradictions.¹

The fundamental contradiction of the inside and outside is a consequence of their separation. We isolate each element to make sense of them. As a result, the inside and outside are conventionally viewed as separate concepts to be addressed one at a time. Venturi refers to this failure in

¹ Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and contradiction in architecture*. Vol. 1. The Museum of modern art, 1977.

complexity as a “less is a bore space”². Venturi suggests “But an architecture of complexity and contradiction has a special obligation toward the whole,” in which “its truth must be in its totality or its implications of totality. It must embody the difficult unity of inclusion rather than the easy unity of exclusion. More is not less.”³ If we are to commit to Venturi’s suggestion of architecture that manifests the difficult whole “in its totality”, then it must not omit any complexities of the contradiction. This architecture would embrace the contradiction through ensparing it. If the contradiction is an articulation of the absurd, then an architecture which enspaces the contradiction is one which enspaces the absurd.

Enspacing the absurd is a demonstration of realizing in architecture that the opposing roles in contradiction are not two independent, separate forces up for casual omission (suicide) to ease complexity; but rather that these opposing roles are in fact two intimately entwined roles of the same part.

Other words may come to mind when thinking of the absurd. We may alternate “absurd” for “illogical” or “ridiculous”. John Silber in his *Architecture of the Absurd: How “Genius” Disfigured a Practical Art* alternates “absurd” for “meaningless” and “functionless” where he assumes absurd architecture is, therefore, meaningless and functionless. The jester’s obvious stupidity makes us laugh because the jester is absurd—he is ridiculous, and he is a fool—but, this does not make the jester meaningless.

The absurd is not meaningless though it may seem to have no meaning. The Dada Movement, as an example, was comprised of a group of Dadaism artists who would exclaim “dada!” in their rebellion against the bourgeois. “Dada” comes from baby’s talk and while it translates to nothing,

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

it was certainly something. Dadaists rejected all values of the bourgeois most famously through their artworks. Dada works sought to rebel and exist as extreme contradictions of the traditional bourgeois art. They tipped traditional bourgeois thinking over on its side, drew over it (quite literally as seen in Duchamp's *Fountain* and mustache on the *Mona Lisa*) and then displayed the new works on a pedestal as art just the same.

The idea of no meaning, but not meaningless also manifests within the Theatre of the Absurd. Traditional art is expected to have certain qualities and similar to the methods the Dadaists performed on the idea of traditional artwork, the Theatre of the Absurd is a contradiction of conventional theater. Perhaps one of the most famed pieces of the Theatre of the Absurd is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett's audience inevitably searches for an expected meaning, only to clap at curtain fall without any plot or great message. Any piece belonging to the Theatre of the Absurd is dramatically different than any other theater piece as they do not exist with the purpose to achieve a purpose. The Absurd work does not concern itself with conclusions or insightfulness, and instead places all focus on the actor and his expression.

Artworks (not limited to theater, paintings, and literature) are known for their expression. They have the intention to make us feel a certain way—even if it is the intention to have us feel nothing at all. Architecture acts in a similar way; prisons are designed to intimidate us, banks are designed to make us feel secure, cathedrals are designed to humble and inspire, and parks are designed to make us happy. If architecture, like artwork and theater, can be intimidating, uplifting, and charming, then surely architecture can be absurd too.

The absurd does not seek explanation just as the theater of the absurd does not seek resolution. Rather than providing definition and explanation, the absurd only describes. Absurdism describes the fundamental contradiction we find between ourselves and the world as a tragic, inescapable

conflict between man's desire for meaning in the world and the world's indifference to man. This contradiction is otherwise the certainty that nothing is certain. Camus, the father of absurdism, refers to the absurd as a 'divorce' or 'confrontation' between man and the world, which is only "in their presence together" (like Venturi's "difficult whole"). If the absurd is born out of the man's need to understand the world, then man alone is not absurd and neither is the world without man. It is man's attempt to find sense in the senseless world which is absurd. The absurd, man and the world's contradictory presence together, is comprised of the following two opposing instances of the contradiction: man existing in the senselessness of the world (collision) and man's awareness of the senselessness surrounding him (rift).

In order to embrace the absurd, we must consider both instances, existence and awareness, to be inseparable and perpetual. Camus considers this to be the only solution to the absurd. He rejects the idea to omit either part of contradiction, referring to the omission of existence as physical suicide and the omission of awareness as philosophical suicide. Acceptance of the absurd, acceptance of the "difficult whole", is achieved through the determination to continue existing within the contradiction "in its totality".

Sisyphus is Camus' famous example of an absurd man and is often referred to as an absurd hero. He is absurd in that he lives with this acceptance of the absurd, persisting to live happily within the absurdity and maintaining an awareness of it. Sisyphus, according to Camus, finds contentment in his eternal punishment of rolling a giant boulder up the mountain only to have it roll right back down as soon as he reaches the top. Camus' *The Stranger*, a fictional work, is also used to demonstrate the notion of absurdism through Meursault's relation to the world and his descriptive-narrative style of this relation. Throughout the entire text, he observes everything with a sort of scientific manner, objective and detached—to even himself.

The absurd life is a life within the contradiction. Camus tell us that there are three characteristics of persisting within absurdity: revolt (to revolt with no hope for conquest), freedom (free from societal values with a continued role in society), and passion (living entirely within the present). These three characteristics are followed by four demonstrations of characters who live the absurd life: the seducer (from lover to lover without hope for eternal love), the actor (living several lifetimes over the course his single lifetime), the artist (the ultimate mime), and the rebel (in a constant state of revolt).

In Camus' works, Venturi's literature, Dadaism's rebellion, and the Theatre of the Absurd's plays, the contradiction that is the absurd comes into form within the arts. Rachel Whiteread demonstrates contradiction physically by casting the space around everyday objects, reversing the roles of solid and void. With this technique she forms the inside and outside as one entity through role reversal. Gordon Matta-Clark's works yield the same result of an inside-outside role reversal as he cuts through walls and floors creating new voids that were always solids. Piranesi's etchings illustrate contradiction in a series of impossible prisons where architectural elements such as stair cases and walls are juxtaposed in a manner which renders them unbuildable. Marcel Duchamp, a major force of the Dada Movement, plays on the contradiction in his effort to make art which exists in sheer contrast (rebellion) to traditional art logic.

Art which embraces the contradiction instigates the idea of an architecture which enspaces the absurd. Each of the above instigators, Whiteread, Matta-Clark, Piranesi, and Duchamp, play with the contradiction by reversing the intended function of the subject matter. Whiteread, Matta-Clark, and Piranesi all work directly with architecture function as Whiteread's *House* solidifies the voids (rooms) within a house, Matta-Clark's *Splitting* cuts a house down the middle, and Piranesi's etchings of architecture depict impossible spaces. Duchamp reverses the accustomed function of common objects by negating the original function through practices such as fusing

them together, tipping them on their side, or marking over them. These resulting artworks reference themselves to architecture and demonstrate contradiction through function reversal as a room made solid or sliced open no longer retains a clear separation of the inside and outside.

The contradiction is not meaningless and not meaningful—it is the idea of meaning and meaningless together in constant tension. If we find absurdity as what is conceptually between man and the world and architecture as what is physically between man and the world, then absurd architecture is the manifestation of this between-ness.

The idea of this between-ness is apparent in Camus' four characters who live the absurd life as they live between rebellion and assimilation of society. The absurd characters maintain a perpetual consciousness of the absurd and with it a determination to continue an existence within it. They achieve this by not committing fully to anything other than committing to nothing and thus are in an everlasting state of in-between; the seducer is in-between loves, the actor in-between lives, the artist in-between worlds, and the rebel in-between revolts.

The explorations of these characters reinforces the idea of the absurd as the in-between. Using their characteristics as design concepts, brings the absurd closer into architecture. Inspired by the contradiction that is Los Angeles, the idea of non-committal commitment allows an imagination of an absurd seducer as a freeway (in-between destinations and never a destination itself), an absurd actor as a billboard (temporary portals in-between lives), an absurd artist as a façade (mimicking the world through reflection), and an absurd rebel as the L.A. River (in-between being connected and disconnected from the city). These considerations of the in-between result in the realization of the in-betweens in architecture: the thresholds.

The threshold, like the contradiction (the absurd), is defined by that which it exists between. The absurd is between the accepted incompatibility of order and disorder, and the threshold is between the accepted incompatibility of here and there. These accepted incompatibilities reference each other in a dualistic relationship where the absurd and threshold are not simply lines drawn between the two parts. The absurd and the threshold are inclusions of both parts as the edge between where the two intersect (whether it is a threshold above us, below us, beside us, or before us). Man without this world, like the lone jester, does not feel the absurdity of life (and vice versa). It is only with the relationship between man and the world that the absurd exists. The threshold, likewise, does not exist unless there is a here and a there.

The separation and connection of spaces are made by the threshold, which at the same time defines two, detached places and attaches them.

“While the bridge, in its correlation of separation and unification, places the accent on the latter and surmounts the distance between its two points of rest at the same time as it makes it visible and measurable, the door demonstrates in a decisive fashion how separating and connection are only two faces of one and the same action.”⁴

The doorway, more specifically and for example, is a threshold which articulates the separation of spaces by the surrounding wall and the connection by the void within the wall. The doorway demonstrates further the notion of separation by placing a door in the void. Swinging in and out of each space, the door is the physical diagram which illustrates the act of intention to go either inside/outside. Simmel suggests, “Precisely because it can also be opened, its closing produces an even stronger sensation of a separation from all that is outside this space than that produced by a mere undifferentiated wall. The wall is mute. But the door speaks.”⁵

⁴ Georg Simmel, "Bridge and Door" *Theory, Culture & Society* 11, no. 1 (1994): 5-6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Building is a result of the human condition to seek order and reason in the world. We build to place order and reason in our lives, which is achieved through the function and too separation of functions within an architecture. The separation, as reason from our human condition, distinguishes the two meanings (functions) and consequently forms an in-between those two meanings. We can see these in-betweens on a floor plan as the doorways between rooms which allow us to flow in and out of each function's space.

The separation enforces that you are either in the room or out of the room—you cannot be in and out of the room at the same time. We are free to walk in and out of the room, but only by means of the doorway: the most conspicuous rendering of the threshold. The doorway does not explain what the rooms are; it only defines the rooms as it exists between them. The threshold therefore does not hope to explain the meanings, but only describes them as those which are against it.

If Camus tells us,

Absurdism is between the world and man; between no meaning and meaning;

Where

The absurd as a rebel stands between indifference and ultimate conquer;

The absurd as a seducer stands between a life devoid of love and a life with one eternal love;

The absurd as an actor stands between the himself and the character;

The absurd as an artist stands between the real world and a false world;

Then,

The absurd as an architecture stands between no function and function
no meaning and meaning.

Absurd architecture is not meaningless nor meaningful; it is in revolt to its meaning and at the same time it is persisting to live alongside meaning: resulting in an existence which is against meanings.

The clearest articulation of the absurd is the contradiction. We reason there cannot be a circle which is a triangle, or a triangle which is a circle. If this is so, then the threshold is the absurd enspaced, because the threshold is the architecture of the out which is in and the in which is out.

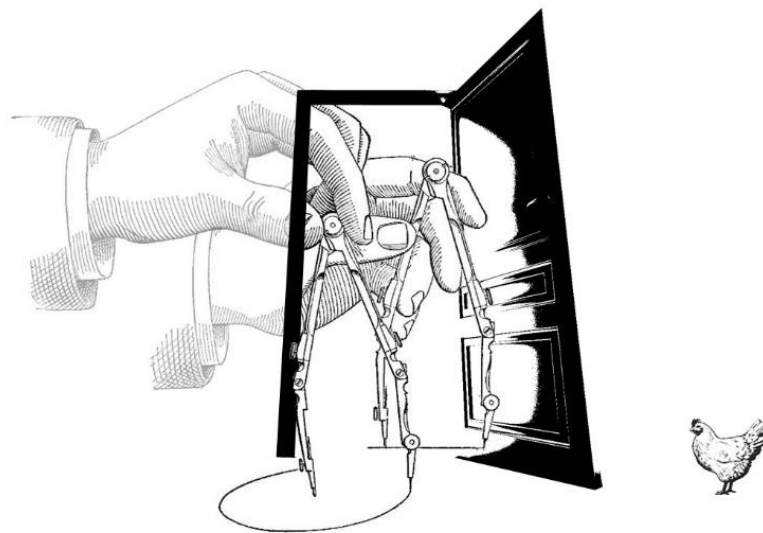


Figure 3.34, The Threshold: The Doorway.

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